

*Robert B. Ramsdell,
Boston, Mass.*

BEADLE'S

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OR,

The "Piping" of Polly Pilgrim.

BY EDWARD L. WHEELER,
AUTHOR OF "DEADWOOD DICK" NOVELS,
"DENVER DOLL" NOVELS, "ROSEBUD
ROB" NOVELS, ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

TROUBLE IN THE BRADDOCK CAMP.

"HELLO, Central!"

"Hello!"

"Give me Inspector Byrnes, Police Headquarters."

"All right."

Ring! ring! ring!

"Hello!"

"AND I AM THAT SAME DEADWOOD DICK, BILLY," REPLIED THE PRINCE OF DETECTIVES, WITH A SMILE.

"Hello!"

"Is that you, Police Headquarters?"

"Yes."

"Is that you, Mr. Byrnes?"

"Yes."

"All right. Please send me a competent special officer at once."

"Hello! Who are you? Yes? All right. Right away."

And Inspector Thomas Byrnes hung up the telephone tube, and turned to a young man who was seated in his private office, at the Central Office in Mulberry street, one pleasant, but sultry July day.

"Yes, Mr. Bristol, it is a decided surprise to see you back in the East again," the official said. "Do you not find enough rascality going on in the West to keep you busily employed?"

"Oh, I presume I could find plenty to do if I were to take the pains to hunt for it," Deadwood Dick replied. "But, the truth is, I have been so busily engaged for over a year, without rest, that I concluded to treat myself to an excursion to the Atlantic Coast in summer-time. I suppose you are busy, as usual."

"Always busy," the inspector replied, "and rather more so at this time of the year, than others."

"How is that?"

"Well, you see, we now have to keep an eye on the welfare of the city, and the great sea-shore resorts as well. Such a large majority of our wealthy families have left the city, for the heated term, that an extra force of private watchmen and detectives are called into requisition to guard the properties; then, another element of our crooks haunts the numerous pleasure resorts surrounding New York, and they'll bear watching too. You'd perhaps be surprised, but just at this moment, there don't happen to be one of my private officers at my command, although some of them are liable to report at any instant."

"That's odd. And I believe you just had a call for an officer."

"Yes, from Trumbull Braddock, the clothing manufacturer. Some trouble at his place of business, I suppose. I might have sent a regular up to him, but he 'phoned so particular about a competent special, that I guess I'd better wait a bit."

"I dare say I would be over-presumptuous in—"

"Not at all, sir, not at all! Providing you have nothing in particular on your hands, you're the very person I could wish to send, for Braddock is an intimate friend of mine, and it has been clearly demonstrated to me in the past, that you are a very good man in your profession."

"Well, I am sure I shall be pleased to be of service to you," Dick said, modestly. "I presume I shall not get down to the sea-shore for a day or two yet, and so I shall need something to do to keep me out of mischief."

"Good. It will be a great accommodation to me. I'll just give you a note to Mr. Braddock, and then you can be off. Mr. Braddock's office is Number — Broadway, and his manufactory is in another street."

Accordingly, Deadwood Dick was soon placed in possession of a sealed note, and started forth.

Once more he was back in the great metropolis, and that too only for a few hours ere he was commissioned on an errand of importance.

What new series of adventures was he again about entering upon?

It scarcely mattered. His life was made up of such a singular and perpetual train of exciting incidents and adventures, that he no longer experienced a sensation thrill in taking up a new skein to unravel.

Crossing from Mulberry street over into Broadway, he boarded an up-town car. In a few minutes he reached his destination, and entered the large and commodious main office of the manufacturer he had been sent to serve.

In answer to his inquiry for Mr. Braddock, he was conducted to a cosily-furnished private office, and there left alone, with the information that Mr. Braddock would join him presently.

It was fully ten minutes, however, before any one came, and then it was a young woman, who, after an inquiring glance at Dick, seated herself at a table on which was a typewriter, and began to finger the keys with wonderful dexterity, proving that she was an expert at manipulating the machine.

She was probably eighteen years of age, with a trim, sylph-like figure, a round, pretty face, with cherry lips and rosy cheeks, brilliant black eyes, and hair to match.

She was clothed in a plain black, neat-fitting habit, and was decidedly an attractive-looking person.

She paid no further heed to Deadwood Dick, after the first glance, but gave strict attention to her work, and to Dick's scrutinizing eyes she made a charming picture.

Trumbull Braddock came in, after a delay of about a half-hour. He proved to be a man of large physique, and evidently considerably past his fiftieth year. His face was broad, massive, and florid, and usually wore an expression of urbanity. There were strong lines about the mouth and forehead, however, which indicated a severity of character, when severity was called for. The eyes were gray and the hair almost white. Beard, he wore none.

"Who are you, and what can I do for you?" he demanded, rather gruffly, as his gaze fell upon his caller.

"My name is Bristol. I was sent as bearer of a message from an acquaintance of yours," Dick replied, calmly.

"Ah! Yes, I see. Lillian"—turning to the girl-typewriter, "you can finish that work later on. I have some private business with this gentleman."

Lillian arose and left the office.

"Byrnes sent you, eh?" the old man then remarked, seating himself, and bridging a pair of glasses upon his nose.

"He did," and Dick produced the inspector's note, handing it to the merchant.

Braddock read it over twice, and then looked up.

"According to this, you've had much experience, for so young a man."

"Yes, more than usually falls to the lot of one of my age."

"I guess you'll do. There are some of Byrnes's men I wouldn't like nosing about my business. Besides, you're not much known here. Ever been married?"

"Yes."

"Good enough! You've had your eye-teeth cut, and won't be fool enough to fall in love with every feminine you see. What's your price for what I want you to do?"

"That depends wholly upon what's to be done, sir. Where I am dealing with reliable parties, I generally leave such matters to their generosity."

"You're a fool, if you do. There's mighty few over-generous people in this world."

"Perhaps not. I don't think, however, that I've ever had much reason to complain. But tell me what's to be done and I can better make you an estimate."

"That won't do. I might post you, and afterward, Byrnes might put another man in your place, and he would have to be told again. I won't have more than one in this matter."

"That is an unnecessary assumption," Dick returned. "If you prefer me, take me. If you would rather have one of the inspector's men, get one of them. It is quite immaterial and I presume it would be the same to the inspector."

Mr. Braddock hardly seemed to fancy this answer, for his brows lowered somewhat.

"You seem rather independent for one who has to depend upon his profession for a living!" he declared.

"For one who does not depend upon any profession for a living. I believe it is my pleasure to be independent, if I chose, sir. I think, on the whole, that you had better get some one else to look after your case, such as it may be."

"I don't think anything of the sort," the merchant promptly replied. "You're the man I want, and when we settle up you can name your price. Now, then, what I tell you is to be strictly a secret between you and myself, until we get at precisely what we are working for. Understand?"

"Certainly. So, please proceed."

"I will do so. My name is Trumbull Braddock, aged fifty-five years. I was born, brought up, and have always lived, in this city. I am engaged in the wholesale manufacture of clothing, and, aside from a prosperous business in this city, own one cotton mill in Philadelphia, and a woolen mill in Massachusetts. I employ, all told, over seven hundred people, and as I transact my business on a cash basis, I have no outstanding line of credit, and own what I have got."

"About six months ago I issued a check to a firm with whom I was dealing, for five thousand dollars, and when it was returned to me, refused by the firm to whom I had issued it, I found that it had been raised to twenty-five thousand. Now, please make note of what I tell you, so you may not miss a point."

"I am jotting down what I want," Dick re-

sponded, memorandum and pencil in hand. "Go on."

"Well, Kinzie & Kahn, to whom this check had been issued, sent it back, wanting to know what it meant, as I owed them no such amount. I had personally made out and mailed the check, and knew I had made no mistake. A private investigation was made between the two firms, and nothing could be determined. It was a mystery, and no one knew whom to suspect or accuse of altering the check. So the matter was hushed up."

"That ended that affair, until about a month later, when my bank returned, with others, a forged check which they had cashed—for two thousand dollars. It was to all appearances made out and signed by me, and made payable to 'Bearer.' I frequently paid a small account of an employee, thus, owing to their having no bank acquaintance, but never any such an amount. The matter was quietly investigated, but no trace of the man who got the check cashed could be found, either among my employees, or elsewhere, except that he was tall, thin, very pale, and had a nose that had at some time in his life been broken and reset. Got that down?"

"Yes. Who assisted you with those investigations—Byrnes's men?"

"Yes. But they were able to find out no more than I myself knew or ascertained."

"Well, what else?"

"Shortly after the last mentioned incident I received a letter, dated at West Brighton, Coney Island, and post-marked Gravesend. Here it is!"

As he spoke, Mr. Braddock took an unenveloped letter from his pocket, and handed it to the detective, who perused it.

It was written in a very pretty feminine style of chirography, and ran as follows:

"CONEY ISLAND, May 7,

"(West Brighton.)"

"MR. TRUMBULL BRADDOCK:—

"Your investigations are of no use. The only thing you can do, to save you from shame, disgrace and ruin, will be to settle with me. If you wish to do so, put a 'Personal' in the *Herald*, to that effect, and you will be acquainted with further particulars. But, save your money by not employing detectives, for they will do you no good."

"POLLY PILGRIM."

As he finished the perusal of this letter, Dick looked up at the merchant.

"Who is Polly Pilgrim?" he asked.

"The devil may know—I don't!" the old gentleman irreverently declared. "I don't know her, nor did I ever hear of such a person, until I received that letter."

"From the tone of the missive I should judge there was a movement on foot to work you out of what money is possible?"

"That seems to be the motive—indeed, I am sure it is, since I have not told you all. Day before yesterday, my daughter, who was stopping at the Brighton Hotel, Coney Island, came home in great haste, with the announcement that the previous evening, while walking along the beach, her portemonnaie, which she carried in her hand, had been snatched away from her by a veiled woman, who fled so quickly as to escape, before my daughter could call for aid. In her flight, however, the thief had dropped a lace handkerchief, upon which were worked the initials 'P. P.' This fact satisfies me that it was this Polly Pilgrim, who committed the theft."

"Did your daughter sustain any considerable loss?"

"Yes. She was to spend three weeks at the Brighton, and had a matter of four hundred dollars in her book, besides a valuable diamond ring, and two large unset diamonds."

"Rather an imprudent way of carrying such valuables, eh?"

"Most unfortunately so. However, the milk is spilled, and there's little good of crying over it. I had resolved to mention nothing of Nola's loss, for she is very sensitive, and detests publicity."

"But, something of more recent occurrence has utterly changed my mind. Rather later than usual last evening, I went home to my residence on Park avenue, and spent some time at my desk in my private library, to which no one has access but myself. I made up a considerable sum of money in a package, for to-day I intended starting for Massachusetts to make arrangements for enlarging my mill property."

"On retiring to my chamber, which opens off my office, I left the money, my private check-book, order-book, and a few architectural draughts and specifications, lying on my desk. The checks and order-forms are specially engraved, with my portrait upon them, and neve

pass out of my hands—that is, before being filed in, signed by me, and certified by a private impression of my own.

"You see," the merchant went on—passing to Dick one of the ordinary check-books—"it would not be an easy task to counterfeit either my check or orders, and more especially as no one but myself has access to either check or order-book. Nevertheless the thing has been done."

"How?"

"I can only explain so far as I know. As I told you, I left the things in my home office, when I retired for the night. The door leading from the office into the hall was firmly bolted and locked, and so I had no fear of invasion."

"Imagine my surprise, then, when I awoke late this morning to find the money gone, and also one leaf cut out of my order-book. I remembered the number of the last order I had given—4648—and so saw that one blank had been extracted."

"Well, it had been my intention to leave the city at an early hour, but, to my surprise, when I arose and made the discovery of the theft, it was after eleven o'clock. I dressed myself, hastened here, and after a few inquiries, telephoned to Byrnes."

"I see. Did you find things right, here?"

"By no means. At ten o'clock this morning, a lad in district messenger uniform came here and presented a letter to Mr. Barron, my cashier and bookkeeper. On opening the letter, Barron found an order purporting to be signed by me—an order for one thousand dollars, duly certified. There was also an accompanying note on one of my letter-heads—But wait, here it is."

He handed Dick another half-sheet of paper containing the following, the chirography corresponding with Mr. Braddock's signature on the sample blank order:

"F. H. BARRON:—

"Shall need a little more cash to take with me than I expected. If you've amount of order in safe, send by messenger, at once. O. K.

"TRUMBULL BRADDOCK."

"The order was apparently so authentic," went on Braddock, "that Barron did not doubt it, and making up a package of ten one-hundred dollar bills, dispatched the messenger, as he supposed, to my Park avenue residence, and bade him be hasty."

"The messenger did not come?"

"Of course not."

"Did your cashier take his number?"

"Yes. It was 16, of the Manhattan District Office, on — street, near my residence. I have held telephonic communication with that office, and the manager informs me there is no Number 16 on his force, the highest number being seven."

"Indeed! Well—"

"Well, there is one thing more to tell you, and then you can make your own deductions. This morning when I discovered the loss of the money, I also found upon the floor a card, bearing the name 'Polly Pilgrim,' so that whoever this Polly Pilgrim may be, it appears evident that she committed the forgery and the robbery. Now, I have told you all I know about the matter, and would like your opinion."

"Well, sir," Dick replied, "there seems to be but one conclusion—that you are being surely and systematically robbed, by one or more persons, and, from Polly Pilgrim's note, I should infer that malice, and revenge, too, might not be a secondary consideration. Now, in order to get an approximate idea of whom this Polly Pilgrim or her confederates may be, it will be necessary for you to answer me, freely, a series of questions which I may see fit to put. By your doing this, I am confident I can plant my suspicion where it will grow into a foundation to work upon. Some of my questions, it is true, may seem impertinent, but, in asking them I have a motive connected only with the case in hand, and what you tell me will go no further. Without this confidence on your part, I would not care to engage upon a case which, at the outset, promises to be a tough one to work up."

Dick had spoken plainly, but to the point, the manufacturer in the mean time watching him, keenly.

There was a moment of silence, then Braddock said:

"It shall be as you wish. There is about your metal a ring that I like, and, although I may be called upon to explain things that I would rather not refer to, your questions shall be answered, and although the loss of a few thousand will not sensibly affect me, I would rather spend a thousand on charity than lose a cent through the dishonesty of others."

"If all gentlemen of affluence entertained your noble sentiments, I fancy there would be less sin and suffering!" Dick remarked.

CHAPTER II.

A BIT OF FAMILY HISTORY.

"Now, the first, and one of the most important questions is," Dick began, "whom do you suspect?"

"No one. I do not know whom to suspect."

"It is evident that the author of the mischief is well acquainted with you and your business methods?"

"It would seem so, and, moreover, is an adroit penman, as the forged note to Barron, which I have shown you, is in excellent imitation of my chirography."

"Who of your employees are most intimate with your business affairs?"

"I have only three office employees who know anything of my private affairs. They are Frank Barron, my cashier, assistant-manager and head-bookkeeper, who has been in my employ for ten years; Walt Westlake, assistant-bookkeeper, messenger, and so forth, and Lillian Braddock, my private secretary, stenographer, and typewriter."

"These people are above your suspicion, I presume, Mr. Braddock?"

"Most assuredly. Barron is an old and time-tried servitor, and I'd stake my life on him, every time. Westlake is a young man of good habits, and has already proved his honesty and integrity in more ways than one; while, as for Lillian, my daughter, I of course could not think of suspecting her."

"You are a man of family, I suppose?"

"Well, yes," and here Mr. Braddock smiled, rather grimly. "I have a wife, son and daughter—yes, two daughters. Perhaps I had better let you into my private life, in the start, and then there will be no confusion hereafter."

"As you like about that," Dick replied. "The more I learn the more likely I am to make a success of the job I have before me."

"Very well. Here is my story, which is known to but very few:

"Twenty-three years ago, I was married to a grass-widow named Martha Norton Flack. Her husband had deserted her, and she claimed to have heard that he was dead. Indeed, she showed me a paper containing a notice of his death, in Havana. She was a pretty, amiable woman of about my own age, and the first year of our married life was very happy. At the expiration of the first year, and shortly before she was about to become a mother, she left me, and wrote me that she had just learned that Jack Flack, her first husband, was alive and on his way back to New York. She begged me to make application for a divorce, and she would assist in my securing it, as she no longer would be an incumbrance to me."

"Well, I did make an application, and the divorce, with her permission, was quietly granted me. From that day to this I have never seen my first wife, although I have heard from her several times—once, when she notified me of the birth of our child, and again, two years ago, when she sent Lillian to me, a well-educated girl, and requested me to find her a situation, as she, the mother, was no longer able to support her."

"On questioning the girl, I found that she regarded me as being her uncle, but would say positively nothing of her past, nor that of her mother. I did not dispel her belief that I was her uncle, but took her into my office at a good salary; and, I may add, I have had no cause to regret that I did so, for she has proved both efficient and trustworthy, and I have been able to make much more of her than another employer would have been free to do."

"Well, after I had procured my divorce, I was very lonely, and felt that there was a void in my life, and as soon as a favorable opportunity came along, I married again—this time to a lady of French descent, named Theodora Arnee. She was poor, but came of a good family, and, although I cannot say I married for love, she made me a good wife, and bore me two children, my daughter Nola, just graduated from Vassar, and my son, Vanderbilt, who, when he becomes of age, I shall take into partnership. That will be two years hence, however, and, in the meantime, he has nothing to do but sow the proverbial crop of wild oats. My son and daughter and myself are the only members of my household, at present, servants excepted, my wife being in Europe for nearly a year, now."

"That, sir, comprises all I have to say of my family affairs, except that I have two requests to make. One is, that, should you have occasion to speak with Lillian, you will not disabuse her

of the belief that I am her uncle. I shall see that she wants for nothing, but would not have her know the unhappy circumstances connecting her mother and myself. The second request is that you make no hint to my son of my intention ever to take him into partnership. While telling him to go ahead and sow his wild oats as he would, I have also warned him that, until he settled down to steady habits, he need never expect to inherit a penny of mine. I give him an allowance of one hundred dollars a month, for pocket money, and if that isn't enough for him, he can go without!"

"I should say that amount ought to do him," Dick assented. "Does he ever ask for more?"

"No, for he is well aware that it would do him no good to do so."

"Does either Mr. Barron or Mr. Westlake live beyond their means?"

"Not that I am aware of. Mr. Barron has money in the bank, and Westlake never overdraws his salary. In fact, I am sure that neither of my three office employees are concerned in this plot against me."

"Do none of them ever visit your house?"

"No."

"And you say none of them—not even your wife, son, or daughter, have access to your private office, at home?"

"Exactly. The two doors opening to my office, one from the hall, and one from the bed-chamber, are provided with intricate locks of special manufacture, and can only be opened with a certain key, the secret of which I alone possess."

"I'll agree with you on one thing," Dick said.

"And what is that?"

"I was never in your house, was I?"

"Not to my knowledge," and the merchant looked curious.

"The key to these locks, is simple—that is, not of remarkable design."

"We'll—I do not see fit to answer that question."

"Oh! it don't matter. The key is a very ordinary one in appearance—such a one as any man might have in his pocket. Yet an everyday key shaped exactly like yours will not unlock your door. You ask me why—so would anybody. The answer is this: The prong of the key does not turn the tumbler in the lock—it attracts it! In other words, the key you use, is magnetized!"

Trumbull Braddock sprung to his feet, excitedly.

"By all that's wonderful! How did you know this?" he ejaculated. "By my soul, I'm tempted to believe—"

"That will do, Mr. Braddock. I know nothing of your key, and never heard of you, until to-day: so your suspicion would be unjust. All I can say is, that that which you have believed to be a secret, I knew years ago! When a mere boy, I used to, as pastime, experiment with magnetism and what it would do, and I worked out the problem, that a spring bolt in a simply constructed and apparently worthless lock, could be drawn back by a magnetic key. Had I been born an inventor instead of a nomad, I could have profited by my youthful discovery."

Braddock resealed himself, a look of profound astonishment upon his face.

"Well, you certainly beat the deck!" he averred. "You have struck the idea exactly, and as the invention is known to but the two of us, I will assist you to make a fortune out of it, if you like. The man who applied it to my locks, is long since dead, and the secret died with him."

"We will discuss that matter, later," Dick answered, with a smile. "At present, other matters claim our attention. Is it not possible that your son, your wife, your daughter, or even your servants may have acquired the secret of access to your office?"

"All things are possible, it is said, but I am confident that none of my family are implicated."

"Do any of your office employees know of your losses?"

"None except Barron, and he does not know all."

"Well, so far as I can see, the case is at present enveloped in mystery, and there seems to be no clew to begin work on. However, to a detective, that is of little importance. I may pick up a thread when least expected. Now, to begin with, have you any enemies—any one who would do you an injury, for the sake of revenge?"

"I do not know that I have an enemy in the world!"

"Might not your first wife, through force of circumstances, enter into a plot against you?"

"I would not dishonor her, sir, with a single suspicious thought. The truth be told, I would sooner distrust my second wife, even though she is in my estimation above reproach!"

"How long did you say your second wife had been in Europe?"

"Let me see; a trifle over nine months. I expect her home, soon."

"Where was she, when you last heard from her?"

The merchant hesitated and flushed a little.

"Well, the truth is, I have not heard from her since her departure from New York. Although naturally intelligent otherwise, my second wife cannot write!"

As a recipient of this intelligence, the detective made no remark, but he certainly was greatly astonished.

To conceal this as much as possible, he busied himself a few minutes with his memorandum, and then said:

"Now, if you give me a few addresses, it may be a help to me. Where do you reside?"

"At No. — Park avenue, this city."

"Where does Mr. Barron live?"

"He has a suite of rooms at No. — North Washington Square, and takes his meals at the St. Denis."

"Walter Webster?"

"Lives with his married sister, Mrs. Barnes, at No. Eleventh street."

"And your daughter, Lillian?"

"She boards at Number — West Fifteenth street."

"Has your son, Vanderbilt, any particular place of resort, where he spends a portion of his time?"

"Well, I can't say as to that, for, the truth be told, now that he has graduated, I pay but little attention to his movements."

"Do you know where your first wife lives?"

"I do not. I have not dared ask Lillian, for fear of exciting her suspicion that I am more than I appear."

"Well, that, I guess, fills the bill of questions for the present. I will deliberate over the matter, and report as soon as I have anything to report."

"Very well. Would you like an introduction to Barron and the others?"

"Not as a detective."

"On, of course. I will introduce you as a prospective partner, and that will disarm any chance suspicion as to your object in coming here."

Accordingly, this was done.

Dick was first introduced to Frank Barron, the cashier, a pleasant-spoken, genial-faced man of five-and-thirty years, whose most notable peculiarity was a very bald head.

Walt Webster, the assistant bookkeeper, was about Dick's own age, a good-looking, neatly-dressed young man, with a slight sandy mustache, and light, curling hair.

Of Lillian Braddock, we have already made mention.

Each one of the trio to whom Dick was introduced, expressed pleasure at meeting him, and it was evident, too, that they were likewise somewhat surprised at the announcement that he was a prospective partner.

The introductions over, Bristol bade Mr. Braddock good-day, and took his departure.

As he left the store, a young man entered, whom the detective at once concluded was Vanderbilt Braddock, the manufacturer's son, from the fact that he looked a great deal like the old man.

He was tall and gracefully formed, with a round, beardless face, blue eyes, and closely-cut light hair.

He was attired in a light suit, wore patent leather low shoes, and a white hat, and upon his immaculate shirt-front blazed a diamond pin of unusual size and brilliancy.

He gave Dick an inquiring stare, and then passed on into the store.

"If that is Vanderbilt Braddock, he is quite a swell!" Dick muttered.

CHAPTER III.

A TRIP TO CONEY ISLAND.

DEADWOOD DICK had only arrived in New York in the morning of that very day, and, as yet, had made no preparations for a place to stop, his baggage being still at the Grand Central Depot, he having come from Albany via the Hudson River Railroad.

Now that he had undertaken the Braddock case and doubtless would divide his time between New York and Coney Island, it behoved him to cast around for a lodging-place.

With its many hotels, good, bad, and indifferent, and its many flats, apartments, and furnished-room houses, the metropolis surely presents a great variety of accommodations.

Dick had no particular desire to go to a hotel, and so, after casting around for awhile, finally engaged a room, with breakfast and supper when wanted, at No. —, West 15th street, in the neighborhood of Eighth avenue, and thither he had his baggage removed.

It was not until after he was duly installed there, that, on looking over the memoranda he had taken down at Trumbull Braddock's, he saw that he was stopping at the same house where Lillian Braddock boarded.

"Well, here's a go," he mused. "I don't know that I am sorry or pleased at this discovery. Perhaps I ought to be pleased, as it will give me an opportunity to observe more of Miss Lillian Braddock than would otherwise be the case. And, the deuce only knows where I am to pick up a clew to begin work on, if not through her."

He spent the remainder of the day in his room, endeavoring to form an opinion to begin work on.

And it was a hard thing to do.

That Mr. Braddock was being robbed, surely and systematically, by some person or persons of more than ordinary cunning, was a certainty, and from the cleverness and success with which these crimes had been perpetrated, the detective was of the opinion more than one person was connected with the scheme.

But who? and who was Polly Pilgrim?

She was evidently a clever penman, and possessed a thorough knowledge of the merchant's methods.

And yet Braddock was loth to suspect any of his employees or members of his family.

"One thing is flat!" Dick at last concluded, "and that is, that the guilt lies between one of four persons—namely, the first Mrs. Braddock, Barron, the bookkeeper, Lillian Braddock, and—and—Mrs. Braddock, number two. The fact that the latter has been in Europe for nine months, without her husband knowing from time to time of her exact whereabouts, strikes me as rather odd, and I shouldn't be thunder-struck to find out that Mrs. Braddock, second, is not in Europe at all! It remains for me to assure myself on that point. Then, Lillian Braddock, her mother, Frank Barron, and Vanderbilt Braddock, must all come under my surveillance, ere I can hope to solve the riddle."

At the supper bell's call Dick went down-stairs to the repast, to discover that his landlady had but few boarders beside himself.

There was a Mr. Guthrie and wife, middle-aged people, a Miss Sadie Sands, whom Dick learned was employed at Macy's; a Mr. Fitzhugh, a music teacher, and last but not least, Lillian Braddock.

Mrs. Russel, the landlady, was a pleasant, motherly woman, who exerted herself to please her guests, and, as the whole party seemed of a sociable turn, Dick began to feel quite at home.

He received an introduction to the other guests, and during the meal he and Mr. Guthrie fell to discussing the political situation of the day.

Miss Sadie Sands was of about Lillian's age, and quite pretty, but more affected in manner, and flashy of dress.

She seemed to take an immediate fancy to the new-comer, and plainly meant to be as agreeable to him as possible, which, evidently, was not to the liking of the long, lank, cadaverous music-teacher, who, Dick judged, was Miss Sands's "company."

Lillian Braddock had little to say to any one, although Dick once caught her regarding him curiously. She quickly dropped her gaze when it met his, however, and he did not catch it again.

"I've been thinking of paying a visit to Coney Island," Dick observed, addressing Mr. Guthrie.

"Which is the most desirable route?"

"Oh! there are a number of routes, all rail, part rail and part water, and all water. I prefer the all water route, via the Iron Steamboat line, in pleasant weather."

"Yes, that is very pleasant," chimed in Mrs. Russel. "Miss Braddock always takes that route when she goes down, and that is nearly every evening. Are you going down to-night, Lily?"

"I have not made up my mind yet," Lillian replied, quietly. "I hardly think I shall."

"I'm going," Sadie said, naively. "I do so like the beach these moonlight evenings."

Dick decided that this was a hint for him to ask permission to accompany her, but on so

short acquaintance he had no notion of doing anything of the sort.

Before supper was over the door-bell rung, and Mrs. Russel brought in a telegraphic message to Lillian, who, after opening and reading it, excused herself, and arose and left the room.

Dick soon after did likewise, and as there was nothing in particular for him to do in New York that evening, he concluded to refresh himself at the sea-shore.

After making his preparations, he left the house, walked over to Sixth avenue, where he took an Elevated train for the Battery.

Arrived there, he had just time to catch a boat for Coney Island, and was soon steaming away across the Bay toward the Narrows.

It was a beautiful night, the heavens cloudless, and the moon, which rose early, full and round like a ball of molten gold.

The harbor was alive with ferry-boats and other craft darting here and there; there was just enough breeze to give a pretty ripple to the water, and glittering lines in the moonlight.

Behind was New York with its brilliantly-lighted water front, to the right Jersey City, to the left Brooklyn and Bay Ridge, and ahead Staten Island, all giving forth their belts of twinkling light. Verily it seemed that the noble Bay was surrounded by a cordon of fire.

The boat was crowded by a heterogeneous mass of humanity—both sexes, all ages, all nationalities, nearly—rich and poor, all bound for pleasure, all more or less jolly or excited.

Out on deck an Italian orchestra enlivened the occasion with lively strains of Strauss and Schubert, but everywhere a confused Babel of voices from over a thousand throats.

Every camp-stool and every other seat was taken, when Dick Bristol stepped on board; so he had to content himself with standing.

There was plenty of room to watch about, however, and he strolled here and there, drinking in the lively scene with avidity and pleasure.

Of course, he had no expectation of seeing any one he knew; consequently, he was greatly surprised, when he suddenly came face to face with Miss Sadie Sands.

"Why, Mr. Bristol, is it really you?" she exclaimed. "I am sure I had no expectation of meeting you."

"I can say the same of you," Dick replied. "Did you come alone?"

"Yes, indeed, although I expected Mr. Fitzhugh to accompany me. But, he is such a queer fellow! Just because I teased him a little he refused to come."

"That was quite ungallant, I should say," Dick replied, while, to himself, he added: "She has found me out, now, and I suppose I am in for it, for the evening."

And he was right. Miss Sands kept him engaged in conversation, and showed no disposition to let him escape.

Although she was lively and pleasant company, Dick did not like the idea of being forced into her society.

They sauntered about, and finally Dick uttered an exclamation.

"What is it?" his companion asked.

"Why, there is Miss Braddock!" he said, pointing toward the front of the boat, where the young lady in question stood partly leaning against the railing.

She was beautifully attired, and looked to far better advantage than when Dick had seen her last.

She was talking to a boat-hand—an old, grimy-faced, repulsive-looking chap, bloated, gray-haired, red-eyed and wrinkled. There was a livid scar clear across his forehead, that added nothing good to his appearance.

"Did Miss Braddock come with you?" Dick inquired, turning to Sadie.

"Oh, no! We seldom go out together."

"Do you know who that is she is talking with?"

"I haven't the slightest idea. I saw her talking to that horrible fellow, once before. She is a strange girl—an enigma that I have never been able to solve," Sadie added, with a mysterious shake of the head.

Dick was considerably more interested than he would have liked to acknowledge.

Had he unexpectedly run upon a clew, or even the shadow of a clew?

Here was Lillian, attired like a rich man's daughter, with diamond earrings in her ears—here was Lillian, in conversation with a rough—ay, ruffianly-looking deck-hand, old enough to be her father!

Who was he, and what was she saying to him?

The first Mrs. Braddock's first husband's name was—here Dick referred to his memoranda—ah!

his name was Jack Flack. Might not this old deck-hand be Jack Flack?

There was a possibility, yes, a probability, that such was the case, else why would she permit his acquaintance?

Dick was busy turning these new thoughts over in his mind, when Miss Sands excused herself for a moment, and entered the cabin.

Almost simultaneously the sailor left Lillian's side, and became lost in the crowd.

Guided by some impulse, Dick sauntered along so as to pass her, and as he drew near he paused, with a pleasant smile, and tipped his hat.

He was going to speak to her, but didn't.

To his utter amazement she stared at him haughtily for a second, and then abruptly turned her back to him.

Had a meteor dropped from the skies and exploded at his feet, Dick could not have been more astonished.

She had given him the cut direct, and hearing a titter from some of the bystanders, Dick colored to the ears, and hurried away.

By the time Sadie Sands rejoined him, he had in a measure recovered from his confusion, although he never felt so cheap and mean before in his life.

Why Lillian Braddock had given him the "cold shoulder," he could not conceive.

He fancied there was a mischievous twinkle in Sadie's eyes when she rejoined him; perhaps she had witnessed his rebuff.

He dared not question her, lest he should betray his chagrin; but he took good care to keep out of Miss Braddock's sight during the rest of the journey to the Island.

At last the good steamer Cepheus made fast at the new Iron Pier, and discharged its cargo of human freight, and then Deadwood Dick found himself upon magic Coney Island, for the first time in his life—at West Brighton, the Bowery of New York over again, only considerably more so.

A queer sensation it was to Dick as he saw the crowds of well-dressed seaside sojourners sauntering to and fro, laughing and chatting together, and evidently free from a thought of care or trouble; saw the myriads of dazzling electric lights, that made the scene as light as day; heard the tremendous blare of the monster steam orchestrons at the merry-go-rounds; the yells of hackmen, the screeches of itinerant vendors and game manipulators, and above all, heard the roar of old ocean, as wave and breaker came tumbling in upon the beach.

In one thing Miss Sadie Sands excelled—she was a first-rate Coney Island guide. She knew every place from Tim Olney's grog-shop on the Concourse, and Red Leary's old "fence," to Manhattan Beach, and now that she had Deadwood Dick practically under her wing for the night, she meant to make him "earn his shoe-leather," to speak in the parlance of the place.

If Dick had felt inclined to be lonesome, he would have found it a difficult thing in that lively throng. The "free" theaters, where a handful of dizzy variety performers catered to the amusement of beer-guzzlers; the shooting-galleries, puppet-shows, cane-games, lung-testers, striking-machines, restaurants, merry-go-rounds, sacred cow, and so forth, and so forth—all came in for a certain amount of inspection.

They visited the elevator, the big elephant, the Sea Beach Palace, with its miniature Niagara falls; they dined at Paul Bauer's to the music of Levy and the Thirty-second Regiment Band; then, they hired a carriage, and drove to Brighton Beach, witnessed the taking of New Orleans, and heard part of a concert by Anton Seidl's Metropolitan Orchestra; so that, by the time they caught the last boat back for New York, Dick could safely say that he was pretty well tired out.

Sadie Sands, however, did not seem particularly fatigued, but chattered like a magpie, all the way back to the city—and, indeed, until they reached the boarding-house, on West Fifteenth street, where Dick bade her good-night, and sought his room.

Thus, his first day back in New York was at an end, and he was not sorry for it.

He had enjoyed his trip to the beach, in a measure, but not so much, he told himself, as he would have done, had not he received the cut direct, from Miss Braddock.

That rankled in his bosom, and put him generally out of sorts.

"Did she suspect his true character?" he asked himself over and over again. If she did not suspect, and yet knew he was a prospective partner in the business, how dared she thus insult him? What was her motive?

CHAPTER IV.

WHO WAS THAT MYSTERIOUS THIRD PARTY?

AN evening at the sea-shore, is nearly as conducive to repose as an opiate, and, although never troubled with insomnia, Dick slept soundly until daybreak, the next morning.

To his relief, when he went down to breakfast, the Guthries were the only ones at the table; so he swallowed his coffee and rolls and beefsteak in some haste, not desiring to meet Lillian Braddock at the table.

He was standing on the doorsteps, however, when she came out to go to work.

"Good-morning, Mr. Bristol," she said, pausing to raise her sunshade. "Did you have a pleasant trip to the Island, last evening?"

"Delightful," Dick replied. "I hope you enjoyed it?"

"I? Why I did not go! I remained at home all the evening!"

"Oh!" Dick said, "I must have been mistaken. I thought I saw you on the boat."

He got no chance to question her further, for, bidding him good-morning, she tripped down the steps, and away in the direction of Broadway.

"Humph! I see how it is, now, I think," Dick mused, gazing after her. "It was the other Miss Braddock to whom I bowed. And that little vixen, Sadie, knew it all the time, and laid the trap which I fell plumb into! Confound her! I could box her ears, with a good will!"

He did not get the opportunity, however, for she, in some way, managed to evade meeting him.

During the forenoon, Dick paid another visit to Mr. Braddock, and found him alone, in his private office.

"Well, young man, what luck?" the merchant queried, brusquely.

"Oh! none, as yet," Dick replied. "You must remember that I have hardly had time to do any work on the case."

"True. Well, I hope you'll soon find out something, for this annoyance preys upon my mind, and I can get but little sleep, nights."

"Rest assured I shall do all I can, in your behalf. I paid a visit to Coney Island, last night, but, having nothing to work on, I could do nothing. Your daughter, I believe, went down on the same boat I did."

"Indeed? But, you are mistaken. Having suffered one loss, Nola is sensible not to visit the Island again, right away. No, she was at home, last evening, entertaining some callers."

"Are you sure?"

"Sure! Why, you might as well ask me am I sure I am living."

"Then, there is a mistake somewhere," Dick declared. "Can you describe to me your daughter's appearance, Mr. Braddock?"

"Certainly. I can do even better than that. I will invite you home to tea with me, to-night, and you can have the opportunity of making the acquaintance of both my son and daughter."

"Thank you. In a business way, I will accept the invitation. But, is there anything to hinder your giving me your daughter's description, beforehand?"

"Certainly not. You have seen Lillian, my secretary."

"I have."

"Very well, then you will see her exact duplicate, when you see my daughter, Nola. They are as like as two peas. For instance, pray examine the two pictures in this locket, and tell me if you can detect any difference in them. If you can, I'll stand a champagne supper at Delmonico's!"

Here the merchant detached a locket charm from his watch-chain, opened it, and handed it to the detective.

Two small photographs were fitted within the case, both being alike.

Dick scrutinized them intently.

"Well, what do you say?" Trumbull Braddock demanded.

"But for two things, I should say that both pictures were of one person," Dick answered.

"And what are the two things? I have shown those pictures to numerous persons, and not one ever saw a particle of difference."

"The only difference I am able to discern," replied Dick, "is that one of the young ladies has slightly broader shoulders, and is larger of bust than the other. As for the faces, they are simply alike."

"You are right. Which one would you pick out to be Lillian?"

"The one with the broader shoulders."

"You have guessed correctly. And, now, what does this all mean? Why were you so par-

ticular about getting my daughter's description? and what caused you to suppose she went to Coney Island, last night?"

Dick explained what is already known to the reader, concerning his taking rooms at the same house where Miss Braddock boarded, about the meeting on the boat, and the singular rebuff, and about the final conclusion he had come to—that the offending lady was Miss Nola Braddock, instead of Lillian.

"Well, this is a queer affair," the merchant grunted. "I don't mind acknowledging to two daughters that look alike, but I'll be hanged if I'll have three on the string! If Lillian says she staid at home last night, she *did*, and you can depend on it. And, as for my Nola's being home, I'll swear to that, and that's the end o' it! So, now then, who is this other woman?"

"You tell me, and perhaps I can tell you," Dick replied. "In face and figure the person I saw on the boat was very like your daughter, Lillian. The only difference was in her attire. She was richly and stylishly dressed, and wore a handsome pair of solitaire diamond earrings. This was one thing that convinced me she was your daughter Nola, after Lillian's statement that she had not been at the Island."

Trumbull Braddock looked grave.

"It is strange—exceedingly strange," he said, "that there should be three girls in this city, all of about one age, and all looking exactly alike."

"The matter must be investigated at once. I'll give you what money you want, and wish you to start for Coney Island at once, and find out who this third girl is. Something seems to warn me that she is in some way connected with the plot."

"It may be," Dick assented. "I doubt, however, if there is any likelihood of finding her there now."

"No harm trying. Find her you must, cost what it may. While you're gone, I'll have a watch kept on my two daughters, to satisfy myself that neither of them are doing anything wrong."

"I would rather you would not do that, for it might conflict with some of my plans, don't you see?"

"I don't see how; nevertheless, I will be governed by your wishes."

"Thank you. Now, when do you want me to return to Coney Island?"

"No hurry until to-morrow. You can drop in here about five o'clock, and I will take you home to tea."

To this Dick agreed, and took his departure. Before going, however, he inquired of Mr. Braddock, if the young man yesterday, who entered the store as Dick went out, was his son, Vanderbilt.

The merchant replied in the affirmative.

"That settles one point," the detective mused. "When I see Vanderbilt Braddock again I shall know him."

Consulting his watch, he found that he would have plenty of time to run down to West Brighton, and back in time for supper with the Braddocks.

So, boarding a car, he set out for new Pier One, from which the boat sailed.

Arriving at the pier, he found out that the boat did not leave for half an hour, so passed some time wandering about the neighborhood, where a number of rough characters were wont to loaf—seamen, longshoremen, emigrants, and the like.

Dick engaged one of the numerous "shining" fraternity to blacken up his boots—a lad of probably sixteen years, poorly attired in sailor shirt, baggy trousers, and jockey cap—a lad with a good-natured, intelligent face, despite the dirt upon it, and sparkling brown eyes and chestnut hair.

He possessed a strong, athletic figure, that indicated the ability to care for himself under most any circumstances.

"Goin' ter Coney?" he asked, upturning his dirty face, as he applied his brushes with an off-hand skill, that proved him to be no amateur.

"I am," Dick replied. "Why do you ask?"

"Oh, nothin'. I was jest er thinkin' it must be boss down thar now. I heerd Jimmy Flannigan tellin' the gang about it."

"Why do you not go down to the sea-shore sometimes?"

"Me? Nix! It takes all I can make to s'port the old woman."

"The old woman?"

"Yes—granny, who I live with."

"Are your parents not living?"

"Guess they are, tho' no one knows where they are. They skipped off an' left me with

grandmother when I was a little sprout about a foot high."

"What is your name?"

"William Bucket—Billy Bucket, for short."

"So, Billy, you've never been down to Coney Island, and you born and brought up here within forty minutes of the beach?"

"No, sir."

"Where do you live?"

"Oh, about a stone's throw from here."

"Well, Billy, I'll tell you what I'll do. Hurry up and finish my boots and go and get your face washed, and I'll take you along with me."

The gamin paused long enough to gaze up at his customer incredulously.

"Git out! You're kiddin' me!" he ejaculated.

"Nothing of the sort. Be lively, now, if you want to go, for the boat leaves in twenty minutes."

Billy Bucket did want to go, and he did hurry in the most approved manner.

Coney Island was to him a wonderland—a fairy-like place—of which he had heard much, and vainly longed to see; and now here was an opportunity afforded to gratify his desire! He would indeed be a ninny not to accept it, he told himself; so he hurriedly finished his job, and skurried away to make his ablutions.

He was back in ten minutes, considerably metamorphosed in appearance, for his face was clean, his hair combed, and he wore a new pair of trousers, a white flannel sailor shirt, a straw hat, and a pair of canvas shoes.

As Dick observed, when they were on the boat, there was not a handsomer or neater-looking lad on the steamer than this self-same New York street gamin, Billy Bucket.

"You'll do, my boy," he said, surveying Billy approvingly.

Although he had been on the water before, this excursion was a source of particular enjoyment to the bootblack, and he chatted gayly.

On the lower deck, Dick espied the same boat-hand who had talked with Lillian Braddock's counterpart the night before, for the steamer was the Cepheus again.

"Billy, do you hang around the piers much?" inquired the detective.

"Yes, consider'ble."

"Do you know the names of many of the boat-hands?"

"Yes, some of 'em."

"You are the very lad I want, then. If you stick by me, and serve me well, I'll make a man of you. I've had a number of apprentices already, and they've all turned out well. How would you like to be a detective?"

"A detective? Be you one?"

"Yes; but, 'sh! not a word of it to any one!"

"Oh! ye needn't be afeard. I kin keep my trap close as a clam in frosty weather."

"Good. Now I am engaged in working up a little case, and I've an idea I can make you useful."

"All right, boss; ye kin jest count me right in. I kinder take to ye, like a coon does ter watermelon, and if there's anything I can do to help you, you can count on me every time."

"Well, if I take you on, you must promise to obey my instructions faithfully, and what you learn connected with the case we shall have in hand, you are to keep strictly a secret from every one except me."

"Correct, boss! You can put dependence in me 'thout fear, an' if I fail ye, I'll let ye kick me clean out o' the country, and then I'll kick myself, which will be equivalent to kicking the bucket!"

Dick laughed at this, and then called his attention to the repulsive-looking boat-hand.

"You see that fellow yonder, Billy?"

"Yes."

"Do you know him?"

"Yes, I know all I want of him, darn him!" and the lad's eyes fairly blazed. "He hit me over the head with a belayin'-pin once."

"Who is he?"

"Jack Flack. He's a crook, an' I wonder the steamboat company employs the likes o' him!"

"A crook, eh?"

"Yes. He only came off the Island about a year ago, where he was sent up for burglary. He's a tough, and aire a bad 'un in a fight!"

"Do you know where he lives?"

"Some'ers up in Elizabeth street: I don't know just where the house is—that is, the number."

So this rough fellow was Jack Flack, eh?—the first husband of the first Mrs. Trumbull Braddock!

The discovery started a serious train of thought in the detective's mind—opened out a vista into which he must penetrate.

Seeing that his companion was preoccupied

in thought, Billy drew a well-worn novel from his pocket and began its perusal. It proved to be one of the well-known "Deadwood Dick" series.

"By Jingo!" exclaimed the boy, after he had read awhile, "that feller, Deadwood Dick, is a trump and no mistake! Ever read about him, mister?"

"Never!" Dick replied, and relapsed into silence, while Billy resumed the perusal, all unconscious that the story hero he so strangely admired, was sitting by his side.

The boat at length reached the iron pier, the two friends went ashore, and Dick took his apprentice around and showed him the sights, much to the gamin's delight.

Tiring of the many shore sights, they procured suits and took a bath in the surf. Then they had dinner, to satisfy appetites that would have done credit to a hungry tramp.

The repast over, Dick found it was time for him to start back for New York.

"Now, Billy," he said, "you've seen what of the Island you need, for pleasure's sake, and I want you to devote yourself to business, for money's sake. Understand?"

"Yes, boss, and I'm all ready, when you tell me what to do."

"Very well. I want you to remain at the Island, until the Cepheus comes down again. Then go aboard of her, and without seeming to do so, keep watch of Jack Flack. Wherever he goes, you go. Don't lose track of him until you are satisfied that he has retired for the night. Be on the lookout for him in the morning; in fact, shadow his every movement as far as possible. If you see him in conversation with a well-dressed, handsome young lady, leave off shadowing Flack, and shadow her! See where she goes, whom she talks with, and as much of what she does, as possible."

"All right, boss, I'm wid yer. But—"

"But, what?"

"I ain't got much money, sir."

"Oh! I'll fix that all right. I'll give you ten dollars, which will last you until I see you again. Don't spend it foolishly, and you will have plenty. I will probably see you, to-morrow, but if anything should happen that I do not, you are to report to me, at No. —West Fifteenth."

"All right, boss. I'll do jest as you've said, if I bu'st. Who be I to ax for, if I comes to Fifteenth street?"

"Mr. Bristol."

"Mr. Bristol? Phew! That's the name of Deadwood Dick, what I was telling you about, in the novel!"

"And I am that same Deadwood Dick, Billy," replied the Prince of Detectives, with a smile. So, now, good-by, for I must be going. Here's the money. Take care of it, and look out for Jack Flack."

And with this parting injunction, Dick hurried on to the iron pier, to catch the boat, leaving behind him probably one of the most astonished boys in the world.

"Jerusalem! what's this I've struck?" the gamin ejaculated.

"That feller the real gennywine Deadwood Dick? Pshaw! I don't believe it! He's jest stuffin' me. I don't know 'bout it, either. He says his name is Bristol, an' darned if he don't tally mighty well with the descriptions of Deadwood Dick. Jeminy! if it is him, I'm in luck, for he's a white chap to tie to, as they say in the story."

"Anyhow, I'm his pard, now, and have got ten dollars in my inside pocket, and so, look out for me, Mr. Jack Flack, for I'll be after you worse'n a Staten Island 'skeeter after a Wall street broker."

The rise from the gamin street arab to a detective *pro tem.* under the command of so famous a sleuth as Richard Bristol, was a leap of importance that Billy may be pardoned for feeling proud of, and if, in his joy, he put on a few extra airs, as he strutted about, equipped with a cigar and a ten-cent cane, which he won at the ring game, he may likewise be pardoned.

For he was a healthy, good-looking lad, and many a young miss cast him a shy glance of admiration, as he strutted by.

When the Cepheus arrived at the pier, on her next trip from New York, Billy was on hand, ready for business.

CHAPTER V.

NOLA BRADDOCK.

DEADWOOD DICK's trip back to New York was uneventful, and he reached Mr. Braddock's office at precisely five o'clock, just as that gentleman was preparing to quit business for the day.

Dick said nothing relative to his discovery of Jack Flack, nor of his taking Bill Bucket into his employ, for it was not necessary that Braddock should know what was transpiring and what discoveries had been made.

They left the store, entered the merchant's private *barouche*, and were driven to his unpretentious but substantial and comfortable residence on Park avenue.

Although the exterior of the house was plain and unassuming, the interior was handsomely decorated and magnificently furnished.

The parlor into which Dick was shown was a marvel in all that was rich, costly and luxurious.

In this room Dick was soon introduced to Miss Nola Braddock, Lillian's very counterpart, except that she was just a trifle more fragile of build. The face, the eyes, the hair—all the prominent features that were Lillian's were also Nola's.

She was attired in a flowing wrapper of pearl satin and lace, and wore no ornaments whatever, except a bunch of syringas at her throat.

Very pretty, indeed, was she, and, as Dick found out, an entertaining conversationalist, and in every way a genial hostess.

The merchant left Nola to entertain his guest, and while they conversed, Dick in vain tried to come to a conclusion whether he had ever seen Nola before or not.

Was she the same girl he had seen on the boat?

He could not believe it, yet was not prepared to decide for certain. Something in her magnetic dark orbs told him that he had been under their influence before.

They chatted for awhile on indifferent topics; then Nola excused herself for a moment to see how near dinner was ready.

While she was gone Dick arose and busied himself examining the pictures upon the wall. Just over the grand piano was a half-length portrait of a remarkably pretty woman of thirty—a fragile-looking creature, with a fine head, poised upon a beautiful neck; large, lustrous eyes and a mouth of tempting sweetness of expression. Both features and temperament indicated that the original of the portrait was of French descent.

"I reckon that's the new Mrs. Braddock," Dick surmised, "a beautiful devil, if I am any judge of physiognomy."

Near the portrait was a smaller crayon picture of a broad-shouldered man, with bushy black hair, a long, curling mustache and goatee, and the blackest of eyes.

He, too, evidently was a Frenchman.

Dick had only time to examine these two pictures when Nola re-entered the parlor and announced that dinner was ready.

"By the way," Dick observed, "may I ask who is that pretty woman?"—pointing to the larger portrait.

"That—oh! that is Ma'm'selle Celeste De Ramza."

"Ah! and this gentleman, of dark aspect?"

"Count Cayvan, a very wealthy Parisian, a great admirer of mamma's before she was married to papa."

Dick asked no more questions, but accompanied his hostess to the repast, where the merchant and his son were already in waiting.

Here Dick received an introduction to the son, and almost immediately took a dislike to him.

Vanderbilt was self-conceited and arrogant—one of those know-everything sort of fellows, with an immense opinion of himself, and a poor opinion of every one else.

His clothing was fine, and his linen immaculate, but the diamond stud of yesterday no longer graced his shirt-front.

Dick noticed this, and so did Trumbull Braddock, for before the dinner was over, the latter said:

"I observe, Vanderbilt, that you don't wear the diamond stud I gave you. How do you explain that, my son?"

Vanderbilt colored a trifle, and bit his lip.

"I left it at Tiffany's," he answered, without looking up from his plate. "It was getting dull and dirty, and so I concluded to have it polished."

"I hope you are telling me the truth, my son," the merchant returned gravely.

"Of course I am telling the truth!" Vanderbilt spluttered, nearly choking over a mouthful of salad. "Seems to me you're getting awfully suspicious, all at once. If you don't believe me, asked Nola!"

"Yes, papa; Van tells you the truth," Nola chimed in.

"Then it's all right," the merchant asserted, evidently satisfied at his daughter's intervention.

"I did not know but what possibly Vanderbilt had got short of funds, and, like many another foolish youth, had pawned the jewel to 'raise the wind' with! Ha! ha! you'll excuse me, my son, for my doubts?"

"You are excusable," Van replied, loftily. "I am too much of a gentleman's son for anything like that."

The dinner over, Dick and the merchant retired to the parlor, while the junior Braddock put on his hat and left the house, with the announcement that he was going to the club.

"Bristol," the merchant remarked, when, with lighted cigars, they were comfortably seated in the back parlor, "I am sorely distressed."

"You refer to the case I am working on?"

"Yes. I have thought this matter of the three girls over, thoroughly, and I have come to the conclusion that there are *not* three girls so remarkably alike!"

"It does seem odd that there should be. But, if there are not this trio of counterparts in existence, there *must* be two."

"Certainly. We know that!"

"Then one of the two of your daughters *must* be the young lady I saw on the boat."

"I am afraid that such is the case. Which of them do you think it was you saw on the boat?"

"I must reply that I have not yet made a decision. The matter is one that requires most careful deliberation. If it was Miss Nola I saw on the boat, she is a skilled actress, or she would have betrayed some token of confusion when we met, to-night. On the other hand, if it was Lillian I saw, she deliberately lied to me, this morning."

"You say the girl on the boat was *richly* dressed?"

"Yes. I don't know much about the nomenclature of female wearing apparel, but I should infer that the young lady's costume cost a goodly sum."

"And she wore diamonds?"

"A pair of diamond earrings, whose value I should estimate to be worth not less than two hundred and fifty dollars."

"That sounds more like Nola than Lillian," the merchant decided, with evident distaste of mind. "On twenty dollars a week, Lillian can hardly afford such costly jewelry as that."

"An item of a hundred dollars, or so, is small in the eyes of a person who can raise a good many times that amount, by a few strokes of the pen," Dick suggested.

"True. You then lean to the belief that Lillian is the culprit?"

"No; I do not yet so conclude. I will say, however, that, if either Lillian or Nola are concerned in the scheme to fleece you out of your money, whichever one it may be is not alone. There is another, or, more likely, others at the bottom of the whole business."

"What causes you to believe this?"

"It is mere impression. Detectives are always more or less moved or influenced by impressions. Mr. Braddock, at what time did you see your daughter the latest, last night?"

"I did not see her after dinner. We dined rather earlier than usual—about four P. M. While we were eating, the servant announced two young ladies to see my daughter. So Nola went into the parlor, and closed the door. I heard the young folks laughing as I went upstairs to my room, and again when I came down an hour later, to go for my usual evening walk."

"This was about five o'clock?"

"Half-past five, exactly."

"Did you hear your daughter on your return?"

"No. It was lodge night, and we had several degrees to confer, so I did not arrive home until a late hour!"

"Then you are not positive that Nola did not go to Coney Island?" Dick persisted.

"Confound it, no! No matter how positive a man might be, I believe you detectives would talk him out of confidence in himself."

"That's a part of our business," and Dick smiled. "When a person loses confidence in himself, he is our victim, in nine cases out of ten."

"Well, if I am not positive, Nola did not go to Coney Island last night, I can soon satisfy you. I will call Nola, and she can say for herself."

"Not for the world!" Dick protested, quickly, "for if you do, I will throw up the case, altogether. Least of all things is your daughter to know that we have the slightest interest in knowing whether she went to the Island last night or not. I don't say she did go. I'm between a kick and a jump whether to suspect Miss Nola, or not. But for one thing, I should be inclined to suspect her."

"And what is this single point that causes you to hesitate?"

"I have made a discovery. But, before I tell you of that, I want to ask you a question. Have Lillian and Nola ever met?"

"Oh! yes."

"Do they know they are related?"

"They understand that they are cousins, and no more."

"Are they intimate?"

"They are not—merely speaking acquaintances."

Dick was silent a moment.

"Tell me," he said at length, "does your second wife know anything about your first marriage, and its result?"

"No, she does not—at least, not that I am aware of. No, what about this discovery you told me of?"

"Oh! it is simply this: You remember I told you of the girl on the boat—Nola's counterpart—talking with the rough deck-hand?"

"Yes!"

"Well, I have found out who that deck-hand is?"

"Who? who?"

"His name is *Jack Flack!*"

Trumbull Braddock leaped to his feet with an ejaculation of astonishment.

"Jack Flack!" he echoed—"Martha's first husband!"

"I suppose so, since it is not probable that there is more than one Jack Flack."

"If this be true, by Heaven I must see this man at once, and find out what has become of Martha!" the merchant declared, excitedly.

"You will do nothing of the sort, as long as I have hold of the helm. After I am out of the case you can do as you please. For you to gratify every idle impulse that assails you, would ruin the case, and I would be working for nothing. Either I command or I now resign," Dick declared.

Braddock glared at the detective a moment, savagely; then his expression changed to admiration.

"By the heavens, you're right!" he exclaimed, slapping his knee. "You're boss! But for you I'd go make an infernal ass of myself, and spoil the whole business. I'd like to see Martha once more, I won't deny, and find out how she's got along all these years; but, then, I can wait until we know better how we stand."

"Quite right," Dick assured. "Jack Flack is under surveillance of a detective partner of mine, and we shall soon know if he plays any part in this drama. By the way, Mr. Braddock, I perceive that there is still a warm spot in your heart for the woman from whom you were forced to seek a divorce—that you have not forgotten her."

"God forbid that I should!" was the husky reply, "for what other woman would have sacrificed her own happiness, and the future of her unborn offspring, to shield me from disgrace? I was just rising in my business career then, and she could literally, by a word, save or ruin me. She saved me, and I shall never forget it—never! But, let's change the subject. Is there anything I can do to help you?"

"Nothing that I think of at present, more than this: Keep everything relative to the case a strict secret from every one but me. I'll work out this enigma yet."

"I hope so. I infer that your opinion does lie toward Lillian."

"I cannot say yes to that. True, there is the suspicious circumstance that the girl I saw on the boat was talking with Jack Flack, and again that Lillian's mother was Flack's wife. Still that is nothing, in my estimation, unless it leads to other evidence. I shall do no one the injustice of an unworthy suspicion, until I am more thoroughly informed."

"Bristol, you are a noble fellow. All your theories are based on good common sense, but it is the common sense of an extraordinary nature. Though it may cost me a pang—for I now believe you believe the origin of the trouble lies nearer at home—I say this: Go ahead and sift the matter to the bottom, no matter who is found guilty. Better disgrace and the truth than this doubt and uncertainty."

Nola entered a few minutes later.

"Papa," she said, "you and Mr. Bristol will really have to excuse me this evening, as I have promised Cora Fellows to accompany her to the Casino to-night, to see Natty. If Mr. Bristol will but excuse me this time, I will try to be more hospitable in the future."

Both gentlemen gracefully accepted the apology, and Nola retired.

"I fancy I see a resemblance in your daughter, to the Mademoiselle Celeste De Ramza,"

Dick observed, after she had gone, glancing at the portrait above the piano, in the front parlor.

Trumbull Braddock started, as though shot.

"Who breathed that name to you?" he hissed, bending toward the detective, with gleaming eyes.

"Your daughter," was the mild reply. "I simply asked whose was the portrait, and received the answer. No offense, I hope?"

"Oh! certainly not. Only the name is one I like not. Yonder woman is my wife. There let the matter rest."

And there it did rest.

Dick now bid his employer good-night, and departed; but he carried with him a mass of mingled impressions, conjectures and suspicions that must greatly affect this peculiar case.

CHAPTER VI.

DICK GETS A LEVERAGE.

DEADWOOD DICK went straight home to his lodgings, in West Fifteenth street, and in his room, devoted himself to long and deep thought.

Nor did he arouse from his reverie until he heard a knock upon the door of his room, and glancing at his watch saw that it was half past ten o'clock. Opening the door, he found Mrs. Russel, the landlady, standing outside.

"Here is a dispatch for you, Mr. Bristol," she said, extending him an envelope. "A messenger boy brought it some little while ago, but I did not know you were in your room, yet."

"Yes, I came in, several hours ago, Mrs. Russel. If you will be in the parlor, directly, I would like to speak to you, in private."

"Very well, sir. I will wait for you, below," the landlady replied, and retired.

Dick returned to the lamp, in his room, and opened the message, which read as follows:

"CONEY ISLAND, July—, '88.

"MR. BRISTOL:—

"You are certainly very zealous, and very clever, but, take care you do not overdo the matter, lest harm come to you. POLLY PILGRIM."

Dick folded the message, and put it in his pocket.

"By Jove! that's cool!" he mused. "Without my knowing her, this Polly Pilgrim already knows me. Humph! the plot grows decidedly interesting—as good as a novel."

He went down to the parlor where Mrs. Russel was awaiting him.

"Mrs. Russel," he said, when he became seated, "are we quite alone, so that there is no danger of our being overheard?"

"We are," the landlady replied, evincing some surprise. "All of my boarders except one went down to the Island together. They were going to invite you to join the party, but you were not here to supper."

"No; I had business elsewhere. Mrs. Russel, I have a few questions to ask you, but what I say I want kept in strict confidence. Can I rely upon you?"

"Certainly, sir."

"Very good. To begin with, I am a detective. When I engaged accommodations here, I really had no idea of encountering a person who is in some way connected with the case I have in hand. But, having found the party here, I wish to learn what I can about her, and, if possible, vindicate her from further suspicion."

"To whom do you refer, sir?"

"To Miss Lillian Braddock."

"Oh, my!" and the good woman put up her chubby hands in astonishment. "What has Lilly been doing?"

"I don't know that she has been doing anything in particular, but that is what I want to find out. She is one of two parties who are under the ban of suspicion, and, as I said before, if I can I want to vindicate her, for I really believe her to be an estimable young lady."

"And, indeed, she is, sir. I am surprised that any one should suspect Lillian."

"We will hope to quietly clear her from reproach. Now, if you will answer my question I will be much obliged."

"Certainly, sir. What is it you wish to know?"

"Did Lillian go to Coney Island last night?"

"Really, I do not know, as I did not see her after she left the supper-table. When she returns, I will ask her if you like."

"No. I must request that you will not do that. I am of the opinion that she did not go, and if I am correct, that is all I want to know, for that will take her out of my case entirely. Don't hint that I asked you the question, nor that I am in the least interested in her. Now another question: Has Lillian any steady company?"

"Oh, yes; and a very nice young man he is, too—Mr. Walter Westlake. He works at the same place Lillian does."

"I have met the gentleman," Dick replied. "He seems to be a nice fellow. Has Lillian any acquaintances at Coney Island?"

"None in particular, I guess."

"Has she a pair of valuable diamond earrings?"

"My, no! She cannot afford such luxuries on the salary she gets, out of which she has to support her mother."

"Do you know where her mother lives?"

"I do not. Lillian is rather reticent on that point, sir."

"Do you think you could find out?"

"If it will not bring harm to Lillian, I might try. But I would not do a thing to endanger her."

"Quite natural; nor would I have you. It is not Lillian I would criminate, and if I could find her mother, I am sure I could make the girl proof-clear of all suspicion. Find where Lillian's mother lives, and I will give you ten dollars."

Now, Mrs. Russel was not a greedy woman, nor a parsimonious one, but ten dollars was equivalent to a week's board, without any outlay or trouble, and that was no small matter to her.

So she said: "Very well, sir, I will try and find out for you."

"Do so, but take care to not betray that any one else is interested in the matter but yourself."

Dick put on his hat and left the house.

Comparatively few Gothamites think of going to bed before twelve o'clock on a Saturday night.

In his wanderings, Dick dropped into the White Elephant, on Broadway, a somewhat notorious billiard room, and resort for sporting men.

Here, engaged in a game of billiards with another youth of about his own age, Dick beheld Vanderbilt Braddock.

He was apparently excited over the game, and flushed from an excess of drink.

Without being noticed, Dick took a seat near at hand, and watched the game.

It was for money, as Dick very soon found out.

Young Braddock's opponent was by far the more careful player, and eventually won the game, and collared the stakes, which were ten dollars a side.

Braddock fished about his pockets for a few minutes, in search of funds that were not there, and then, as a last resort, put up his watch against ten dollars, for another game.

It was not until after the game began, that he spied the detective.

He colored, and was confused for a moment; then recovering his composure by an effort, advanced and extended his hand.

"How are you?" he said, familiarly. "Glad to see you. Ever play billiards?"

"Never," Dick answered.

"Well, you're in luck. I play a fine game sometimes, but to-night, unfortunately, luck's against me."

He returned to the table, and resumed playing.

Although Dick was but little posted in the game, it soon became apparent to him that Van stood no chance of winning.

He was nervous and unsteady, while his opponent was quite the reverse.

When Braddock had scored only sixteen points, his opponent had twenty-seven and the lead, and, without any apparent effort, ran the game out.

Braddock then wanted to play another ten dollars' worth on the watch, but the other magnanimously declined.

"You're in bad luck," he said, "and I won't take advantage of you. Your watch is worth a hundred dollars. I will hold it ten days, to give you an opportunity to pay me the twenty dollars you owe me," and putting up his cue, he walked away.

Young Braddock stood for a moment, staring at the floor as if dazed; then, as if impelled by desperation, he turned to Deadwood Dick.

"I'm dished!" he said. "That fellow has got my watch, and I've got the games to pay for, without a cent to pay for them. Bristol, you are a stranger to me, but I beg of you to help me out this scrape. Lend me twenty dollars, till I see the old wo—I mean an acquaintance of mine, and I will pay you back without fail to-morrow night. But, don't say anything about this to father. I—I— If that fellow

gets away with my watch, I'll never see it again!"

"Til I see the old wo—I mean an acquaintance of mine!"

The words fairly took Dick's breath away!

What had he discovered?

What had he not discovered?

"Certainly, I shall be most happy to help you out of a little trouble like this," he said, drawing a roll of bank notes from his pocket, and counting out five fives into young Braddock's hands. "Hurry up, now, and come back, when you get your watch."

The merchant's son thanked him, and hastened away, in an ecstasy of delight.

As he did so, a slip of paper dropped to the floor from his pockets, in which he had vainly been fumbling, in quest of a possibly mislaid bill.

Dick picked up the paper, examined it carefully and then put it away in his pocket.

"It is as I thought!" he mused. "By Jove! I think I begin to see my way clear. At any rate, I have got a leverage!"

Young Braddock returned, a few minutes later, with a smiling countenance.

"All O. K.," he said. "I've got my watch, and I am mightily obliged to you!"

"Oh! don't mention it!" Dick returned. "I know what it is to be in a hole, myself. By the way, I'm going down to Brighton, Monday, and think I can put you in a way of making a little money. What do you say?"

"How do you mean—on the races?"

"Yes."

"I'm with you, heart and soul. I shall have some money by that time, and we'll go in halves."

"Agreed. In the mean time, let me give you a little advice. Drink no more to-night. You want a clear head Monday. I am also going to the Beach to-morrow. You had better come with me, and I'll see you don't get underboard."

"I'll do it," Vanderbilt assented, after a moment's reflection. "I don't know what you are nor who you are, except by name, but you've used me white, and I'll use you the same. Where will I meet you?"

"At Iron Steamboat Pier, ten o'clock, sharp."

"All right, I will be there."

They separated, Dick going direct to his lodgings. He had been but comparatively a few hours in the metropolis, and yet believed he held the key in his grasp that would unlock a most peculiar plot.

And, needless to add, Vanderbilt Braddock was the key he proposed to utilize.

CHAPTER VII.

DICK'S DIPLOMACY.

THE morrow came—one of those days at the seaside so delightful to some, and so obnoxious to others.

It began foggy, dull, drizzling and dismal.

By ten o'clock few people were abroad—here and there occasional fayers returning from mass; the inevitable group under the saloon-keeper's awning, and a couple of venturesome gamins.

When Dick made his appearance at the Iron Steamboat pier, he found only a handful of people gathered there to take the boat, Van Braddock among them.

"I am afraid we're going to have a dismal day of it," the merchant's son said, with a shiver.

"Oh! I guess not!" the detective encouraged. "These are the sort of days one enjoys on the water. You seem a bit shaky."

"I should say so. Haven't had my accustomed nip yet, and then, too, I've met with another loss, that is not pleasant to think of, but I suppose there's no use of worrying about it."

"Anything I can help you out of?"

"Oh! no!" with a deep-drawn sigh. "It's nothing you can remedy."

Dick knew otherwise, but did not say so.

"What you want is something to warm you up," he suggested. "Let's go aboard and see if any of the lightning they dish out will have effect upon you."

So they went on board, and, as soon as the boat had slipped out of her slip, Dick took the young man to the bar and ordered a hot whisky, which seemed to "brace up" the flabby young man about town.

"There!" Dick said, taking his arm after he had dispatched the beverage, "that's all you will get until you have had something to eat, and very little you will get afterward. If there's any of your father's stamina in you, I'll try to make something of you. If there's not, why, you'll fetch up in jail!"

"What? What do you mean?" Van articulated, staring at the detective blankly.

"Come above and I will tell you," was Dick's answer.

They ascended to the next deck and took a seat, where the mist could not strike them.

"Now, then, I want to know what you mean by your reference to my going to jail?" Van demanded, an angry glitter in his eyes. "I'm not used to being addressed in that manner."

"Then, the sooner you get used to it the better for you," Dick replied. "Your present manner of life is simply shameful. Do you not know that you are doing your father a great wrong, and at the same time killing your own prospects with him?"

"I don't know what you mean. What have I done?"

"Enough, that, did your father know the true state of affairs, he would kick you into the street, and forbid you his house. For one thing, you told him a positive and outrageous falsehood, and, worse than all, your sister backed you up in it!"

Young Braddock turned pale, then flushed with anger.

"Your impudence is truly refreshing!" he gritted. "If you think I'll stand this sort of thing, you'll find out to the contrary. I've not lied to my father, nor to any one else, and I demand an apology from you!"

"If you were entitled to one you should have it, but you are not," Dick returned, decisively.

"You needn't get into a passion, for it won't do you any good, but rather will imperil your future prospects. I've got you dead to rights, and the best thing for you to do is to take things philosophically, young man. You *did* lie to your father, and I have the proof of it. You told him you had left your diamond at Tiffany's to be polished, when you did nothing of the sort. Your diamond is in pawn at Simpson's, on the Bowery, and, *I've got the ticket!*"

"Ha! then, curse you, it is *you* who robbed me!" Van cried, leaping to his feet, flaming with rage. "Give me that ticket, instantly, or I'll have you arrested!"

"Sit down, young man, and be calm, or it will be *you* who will be arrested!" Dick coolly retorted. "Do you see this?" and the detective turned up the lapel of his vest, and exposed his badge.

"You perceive," he went on, "that I am not without authority, so you had better conduct yourself quietly, or you will get yourself into a scrape you won't get out of very easily."

"Bah! who's afraid of you?" and the merchant's son snapped his thumb and finger contemptuously. "I've done nothing I can be arrested for."

"Haven't you? Well, young *roue*, if I so choose, I could arrest you for conspiracy in a scheme to defraud your father out of his money—for forgery and for theft!"

Vanderbilt gazed at the detective a moment, strangely, and then gave vent to a sneering laugh. "Either you're crazy or a fool, for I never heard such a mess of nonsense before."

"I am quite too smart for such scamps as you," Dick replied, "and if you don't tell me what I want to know, I'll put the bracelets on you and land you in jail. How would that suit?"

Van winced, and grew very pale.

"Well, I'll be hanged if I know what you are talking about. I'll swear I don't know of any such scheme, and if there's anything you want to know that I do know, why I'll tell you. I'd like to know, too, how you got hold of the pawn-ticket."

"It fell out of your pocket in the White Elephant last night, and I picked it up."

"And you don't propose to give it back to me, eh?"

"Not unless you help me to explode this plot against your father. If you do that freely and fully, and show a disposition to lead a more straightforward life, I shall no doubt be able to save you not only from disgrace in the eyes of your father, but also from arrest."

"There you go again, speaking in riddles. I never studied to be the editor of a puzzle department, so you will have to excuse me for a lack of comprehension. What is it you want to know?"

"First of all, where is your mother?"

"Over in Europe, I suppose. She's been there upwards of a year now."

"You don't suppose anything of the kind. Your mother is not in Europe."

"No? Well, you know more about it than I do, then. I have been given to understand that she was there by father."

"Van Braddock, you lie! You know your

mother is not in Europe. You know that she is living in New York, or very near it."

"I know nothing of the sort. Nor will I stand another accusation that I lie!"

"How are you going to help yourself? When you do lie, you need not take offense at being told of it. Now, then, perhaps you can explain this: Last evening, when you promised to pay me back the money I loaned you to-night, you started to say you would get it from the old woman, but abruptly corrected yourself to say acquaintance!"

If this was a staggerer to the young man, he did not betray as much surprise as might have been expected, but laughed peculiarly.

"Well, since you have such a *penchant* for meddling with other people's business, I suppose I might as well explain," he said. "I've been keeping company with a widow's daughter and the old woman, as I sometimes call the widow, has set her heart on seeing her daughter married into the Braddock family. On the strength of that I've been able to get the loan of ten or twenty now and then, when I happened to be short. So, you see, you're off the track. As for mother's being in America, that's all utter nonsense."

Dick remained silent a few seconds.

Van's story was plausible, but the wary detective was not prepared to believe it. However, it might not be policy to pretend longer to doubt the young fellow, so he said:

"Well, we will waive all that at present. We detectives often have to suspect guiltless persons. If I have given you unjust offense, pardon me."

"Of course I will," was Van's quick rejoinder. "Now I wish you'd give me back that pawn ticket. I would not have father know that I had the stud in the hock for a good deal."

"How much is it in for?"

"Seventy-five dollars."

"A big figure. I ought to give the ticket to your father," he said, "but to protect you from being caught in a lie, I'll make a bargain with you."

"What is it?"

"Promise me not to say a word of what has passed between us to a living soul, nor to hint that I am a detective, and I will get the diamond out of pawn for you to-morrow."

"By Jove, I'll do it! I promise you upon my word as a gentleman."

"Very well. That is sufficient. I caught you in a lie to your father, and naturally thought you might be suspected otherwise. But, let it drop."

And there it did drop, so far as any conversation on the matter went.

But not by any means was Dick disposed to leave that trail.

He now felt doubly sure that Van had lied to him, and that Theodora Braddock was in America, and knew that, if such should prove to be the case, mother, son, and daughter were equally concerned in the plot against the merchant.

Until he was in better position to prove all this, however, Dick did not wish to occasion unnecessary alarm in the camp of the enemy; hence his conciliatory terms with them.

He could, at least, wait until Billy Bucket reported the result of his shadowing.

CHAPTER VIII.

BILLY BUCKET'S DISCOVERIES.

THE boat steamed on through the misty morning, but ere she had rounded Coney Island point, the fog lifted, and the clouds began to scatter; ere the boat touched at the pier, the sun shone out with summer fervor.

Dick and Vanderbilt wandered about West Brighton for awhile, but ere long the merchant's son contrived to drop his companion, and was not to be found again.

Dick had rather expected some such dodge as this.

"He's a sure enough rascal," Dick concluded, "and there is some one right here whom he knows, and has gone to communicate with. The chances are that I've spoiled the whole business by letting the scamp into the secret of my calling!"

The thought was not particularly pleasant, and, in no good humor, Dick tramped about in quest of Billy Bucket.

At mid-day, every vestige of the disagreeable morning had vanished, and long railway trains, laden with humanity, came rushing into the little city by the sea, only to be emptied, and return New Yorkward, for another freight of passengers.

Boat-loads of passengers also came, and the whole island from West Brighton to Manhattan Beach literally swarmed with people, making it

a great holiday more than a Sabbath day of rest.

The water front was alive with bathers, both old and young, lean and fat, who soused, splashed and screamed to their hearts' content; the merry-go-rounds were crowded with riders who loved to be gaped at—gigling girls, and mature matrons in predominance; the countless beer-iums and other booths and catch-penny fakes were simply coining money, and the boulevard was crowded with gay equipages filled with the *creme de la creme* of upper ten society.

Everywhere was life, bustle and merriment, every person vying with each other by way of making the most of a pleasant day's outing.

Deadwood Dick was here, there and everywhere, in anxious search of his apprentice, but it was mid-afternoon ere he found that young man, busily engaged in the mastication of one of Paul Bauer's dinners.

"Ah! I've found you at last, have I?" Dick said. "I have been looking a good three hours for you. What's the best word, Billy?"

"Oh! I've got a lot to tell you, boss, but just at present I'm engaged in filling the Bucket, so don't disturb me. When I've got my fill I will talk."

"All right, my boy. Sail in and get your fill, and I will wait for you," and he seated himself at the table. "Only be careful not to overtax the capacity of the kitchen, for there are others down here to-day who may want to get a meal, if there's anything left."

Billy grinned and resumed his food with a gusto that left no doubt but what he was hungry.

When he had finished and paid his bill, he and Dick left the restaurant, and going down to the beach, sauntered along the water's edge in the direction of the Brighton Beach Hotel.

"Now, then, Billy, let's hear your report," Dick commanded.

"Well," replied Billy, "I folloed your instructions to ther letter. I boarded the Cepheus soon's she come down yesterday, an' rid back an' for'a'd on her till night, next to her last trip down. Jack Flack were on her all the time, but I kinder like kept out o' his way."

"When on ther next to ther last trip down, Flack an' the capt'ing had a quarrel 'bout suthin', an' Flack punched the capt'ing in the nose and drew blood. When the boat teched at the old iron pier, Flack was bounced off, and told if he ever come onter the boat again he'd be throw'd overboard. So, as he were off, I got off, too."

"Well, Flack he cussed around for awhile until he was ordered off the pier, and then he went around from saloon to saloon an' filled up on stagger juice till he couldn't hold no more, an' then he went over into a bad locality known as 'The Gut,' put up at a cheap lodging place, and I didn't see no more of him till this morning."

"Well," pursued Billy, after lighting a cigarette, "I left Flack there for the night, but took good care to be around bright and early this morning, so that there should be no chance for him to give me the slip."

"I wasn't none too early, neither, for he was up, and about two sheets in the wind, at that. I watched him when he left the place, an' folloed him. Ye'd be surprised to see how he was fixed out. He had on a new suit o' clothes, a new hat, a white shirt, and had his hair and whiskers trimmed up, an' looked the most respectable I ever saw him."

"He went to Baeder's Hotel, up thar where the boulevard begins, and then he got inter a hack and went to the Brighton Beach Hotel, with me folloerin' in another hack."

"When he got there, he seemed sort o' familiar, like, fer he left a note at the office, and then went and took a seat on the piazzer."

"I savvyed that it wouldn't do for me to make myself too conspicuerous, an' so I kept a respectable distance, where I could keep an eye on him. I kin tell ye I hadn't had no breakfast, and I kinder felt as if this Bucket war kinder empty, but I wasn't lettin' Flack slide, nobow."

"Well, after awhile, a lady come out o' the house, and wandered down to the beach; she was tall and slim, and dressed in black. I couldn't see her face, fer she wore a veil over it. Purty soon, Flack he gets up, and goes down an' meets the woman on the beach. On course it wasn't polericy fer me to folloer, an' so I had nothin' ter do but to lay shady, and use my eyes, instead of my ears."

"Flack he offered to shake hands with the woman, but she kicked onter that. Then, they chinned together, for I sh'd say ten minutes. I hain't got no hoss-timer, so I couldn't say ef I'm correct as to ther exact minnits. The wo-

man didn't seem to cotton much to Flack, and jedgin' by several theater moves she made with her hand, I reckoned she was excited."

"Well, anyhow, after a spell more o' chinnin', the woman give Flack suthin' that looked like money, and then turned upon her heel, opera like, and come back to the hotel, and that's the last I see of her."

"Hum!" and Dick removed his hat long enough to wipe the perspiration from his forehead. "Is that all?"

"No, it ain't. But, ain't that suthin'?"

"It is. You've done far better than I had reason to hope for, Billy. I am proud of the success of your first effort in the detective line. But, go on; give me what other details you may have."

"Well, there ain't much. After the woman left Flack, he wandered up the beach a ways, and sat down on the dry sand, and appeared to be watchin' the ocean. He stayed there for an hour, I reckon."

"In the mean time, I got chinnin' with one o' the hotel employees, what wanted to borry a cigarette from me, an' axed him who the woman in black was. He sed she was a rich lady, as lived in a country seat, back on Long Island, somewhere, and that her name was Mrs. Cayvan. That's all I could pump out of him."

"So, when Flack got up and started for West Brighton again, I folloed him, at eye distance. One o' the railroad depots puked out a swarm o' passengers all at once, however, and I lost Flack, and wasn't able to locate him, ag'in. So as the inner Bucket needed a fillin', I concluded to have a feast."

"Perfectly right. You've done all I could ask of you, Billy, and I feel sure of winning the case. If we do, we shall both be a dollar in pocket. Now, let me think, as we walk on."

And as they strolled along the beach, Dick carefully considered all this new evidence. He was no longer at fault whom to suspect.

He was now more sure than ever that Mrs. Theodora Braddock was not in Europe, but was the veiled woman who, according to Billy Bucket's account, had met Jack Flack in front of the Hotel Brighton. Instead of traveling through Europe for pleasure, she was quietly living in America, separated from her husband, for profit, and such of her schemes as had already been attended with success were no doubt but the incipient stages of the greater and more sweeping haul which she expected to make.

Flack was a low-bred ruffian, yet she had given him money.

What for?

What for, indeed, unless it was hush money?

Then recurred to the detective's mind the circumstance of the portraits. When he had asked Nola Braddock regarding the portrait of the French beauty in her father's parlor, the answer had been that it was Mademoiselle Celeste De Ramza.

And the picture next the portrait Nola had said was of Count Cayvan, a millionaire Parisian, and a former admirer of her mother.

Not an hour later Trumbull Braddock had said the portrait was of his wife and had seemed displeased at mention of the name Celeste De Ramza, and had requested that the subject be dropped.

Now, then, here was a veiled woman in black, stopping temporarily at the Hotel Brighton, who lived at a country seat on Long Island, and who also knew Jack Flack well enough to yield to his importunities for money.

And Flack was the husband of Trumbull Braddock's first wife!

To the detective, out of that mass of fact slowly dawned the truth.

Mrs. Theodora Braddock was living in comparative retirement at a Long Island country seat, and devoting her leisure time to swindling her husband, aided by her son and daughter, Vanderbilt and Nola.

She was living under the name of Mrs. Cayvan. Perhaps with Count Cayvan, whose picture occupied a place in her New York parlor! Perhaps, again, she was the count's wife, prior to her marriage with Braddock, and she and the count were working hand and glove in this criminal matter of swindling.

This latter idea struck the Wild West detective as being quite consistent with all the conditions of the case.

Granting that such was the fact, how was Jack Flack connected with it?

How? Well, perhaps Flack had stumbled upon a knowledge of the daring scheme, and of the woman's marriage to Trumbull Braddock, and had turned his knowledge to account as a means of extorting money.

"Well, boss, hev you got it figgered out?"

Billy demanded, finally, his curiosity getting the better of him.

"Yes, or very nearly so," Dick replied. "What I want now is to find out more about this woman in black and I think I can attend to that alone. For you, I've got another matter to attend to."

"Shadder Flack again!"

"No, Flack can take care of himself for the present. I want you to take the first train back to New York, and call on Mr. Trumbull Braddock, at Number — Park avenue. Tell him that I sent you, and want him to come here at once, and put up at some quiet place—Thompson's Hotel, for instance—and remain there until I call on him. Tell him that I have made an important discovery; but say no more. Understand?"

"Yes, boss."

"Very well. Be off by the first train now, lose no more time than is necessary. You can return with Mr. Braddock, and then devote your time to hunting up Jack Flack, and keeping him under surveillance, until I see you again. Have you money enough?"

"Yes, for the present. Hello! Look yonder!"

They had left the beach, and were walking along the edge of the Concourse, near where the Boulevard branches off, and runs to Prospect Park, Brooklyn.

Coming toward them, from the direction of the Hotel Brighton, was a handsome barouche, equipped with a high-stepping span of bays, and a liveried driver and footman.

The barouche contained a party of four, besides the servants; one a large man of past the middle age, with iron-gray, bushy hair, a heavy pointed mustache and goatee—a living reproduction of the picture of Count Cayvan, in the Braddock parlor, except for the silvery streak in the hair and beard.

He was well dressed, and decidedly imposing of appearance.

Beside him was seated a tall, slender woman, dressed in black, and wearing a *crepe* veil over her face, that rendered her features undistinguishable.

Opposite her sat Vanderbilt Braddock, and opposite the count sat the same girl Dick had seen on the boat!

She was identically the same, even to dress and jewelry.

A passing string of stages partly concealed Dick and Billy from those in the barouche, and so they escaped discovery.

The barouche wheeled off the Concourse into the Boulevard, and sped away toward Brooklyn.

"There!" Billy exclaimed triumphantly, when a cloud of dust hid the conveyance from view. "That woman in black is the same one that held the confab with his royal ribs, Jack Flack."

Dick nodded.

"I understand," he said. "You've been of great service to me, my boy, and you shall be well paid. I don't suppose there's any use of my going on to Brighton Beach now, so I will return with you as far as the Culver depot, and see you off for New York."

Accordingly, they retraced their footsteps, and Billy Bucket was soon on the cars, speeding away toward the metropolis.

As for Dick, he resumed his saunterings about West Brighton, played a game of billiards here, tried his hand at target practice there, and altogether felt elated over his success in getting so neatly at the game he had set out to capture.

If Theodora Braddock, *alias* Mrs. Cayvan, was Polly Pilgrim, why, it already began to look as if serious trouble might soon overtake the aforesaid Polly and her associates.

CHAPTER IX.

LILLIAN'S DELIVERANCE.

A COUPLE of hours' wandering about West Brighton brought Dick to the conclusion that he was getting leg-weary, so entering one of the free music and variety pavilions, and taking a seat at a vacant table, he ordered a beer.

The entertainment was of a tame, uninteresting character, and Dick was beginning to consider the advisability of going for something to eat, when he felt a tap upon the shoulder, and looking around, found Walt Westlake and Sadie Sands standing in his presence.

"Good-morning, Mr. Bristol—or, more appropriately, I guess, good-afternoon!" Westlake saluted. "I see you are enjoying yourself."

"Passing away time, rather," Dick replied: "for I'll vouch there's nothing about this show

to make one particularly joyful. Won't you sit down?"

"No, thanks. We are looking for Miss Lillian, who came down with us, but got separated from us in the crowd. I didn't know but you might have seen her."

"No, I have not."

"Oh, well, we doubtless will find her soon. Come, Miss Sands, let's resume our search," and Westlake turned away, Sadie following him, much to Dick's relief, as he half expected she would try to saddle herself off on him.

After they were gone Dick left the pavilion, and began a search for Lillian Braddock on his own hook, more to satisfy a doubt that had arisen in his mind than aught else.

What if, after all, it should turn out to be Lillian whom he had recently seen seated in the Cayvan barouche?

It would be a disappointment to him, yet he was prepared not to be astonished, if such should be the case. If Lillian was not now to be found, for the searching, he was prepared to believe her the girl in league with the conspirators.

A half-hour's search of the crowded resorts, where music of good, bad and indifferent quality kept up a constant and aggravating din, that would have put to flight the craziest enthusiast, then, and only then, Dick found Lillian.

She was seated in a retired corner of one of the least patronized music pavilions, in conversation with—Jack Flack!

Dick stopped as if shot when he saw her; then he changed his position so that he could watch her without being noticed himself.

She was attired in a pretty suit of summer silk, with a bunch of tea-roses at her throat, and the fine head capped with a jaunty sun hat.

A strange contrast she made to stiff-laced Nola, whom Dick at once decided was the girl in the barouche.

Lillian's face now was not a merry one, as she conversed with Jack Flack. Her features wore a pained, half-frightened expression, and her lip quivered when she essayed to speak, but invariably left the sentence unfinished; for Jack Flack was there to do the talking, it would seem, and would admit of no argument or protest.

"I wonder what that bull-neck brute is saying to her?" Dick mused, his brow darkening.

"What he is saying is not pleasant, that's plain, for she seems to fear him. I've a notion to go over and drive him away!"

On second thought, however, he refrained. He would wait until Flack had left Lillian, and then endeavor to draw from her the nature of their conversation.

He had not long to wait.

After smiting the table, emphatically, with his fist, Flack arose, and strutted away, while Lillian buried her face in her pocket-handkerchief, and remained where she was.

Dick waited until Flack had disappeared, and then went over and took the seat the rough had just vacated.

"Miss Braddock, you look as if you were in trouble," he spoke, in a low tone.

Lillian looked up with a start.

"Why, Mr. Bristol?" she gasped, drying her eyes.

"Of course," he calmly replied. "I saw Jack Flack worrying you, and I've made it my business to inquire into the cause."

"Oh! I cannot tell you, Mr. Bristol. I'll admit that I am in trouble—such trouble as I never dreamed of, before to-day. But, it is nothing you can alleviate. You are very kind, but do not attempt to burden yourself with my troubles!"

"But, that is just precisely what I propose to do," Dick persisted. "I already know more about you than you know about yourself, and I now bid you to pay no more attention to what Jack Flack said. Listen: I am a detective, in the employ of Trumbull Braddock. I can protect you against a hundred like Jack Flack. Will you come with me to a quiet place where we can converse, freely? I will guarantee your perfect safety, and will prove to you that I will defend you against a plot that is made up to ruin you. Flack threatened you, didn't he?"

"Yes, sir!"

"I knew it. He is a vile wretch and thorough knave, and will be behind the bars, within a week. Will you accompany me, Miss Braddock?"

"Yes, but you must tell me first where you are going!"

"To a quiet little hotel, with pleasant ocean view verandas, where we can have a lunch, as we chat. I refer to Schieffler's, facing the new proposed park."

"I am acquainted with Mrs. Schieffler, and

she is a very nice lady. But, I question the propriety of my going there alone, with you. If Sadie—"

"I should bar Miss Sands out, even at the cost of her displeasure," Dick interrupted. "My business with you is purely in the line of my profession, and in the hope of preserving your good name from the scathing hand of the newspaper reporter. If you see fit to trust me, I will endeavor to shield you from unnecessary embarrassment. If not, no harm is done; you will simply have to take pot-luck with the rest."

Lillian gazed at him, wonderingly. She had never as yet met a person who impressed her so strangely as this Mr. Bristol—this man who was so gently commanding—intrusive yet the thorough gentleman.

"I will go with you," she assented. "I've had but little worldly experience, sir, but I think I can safely trust myself with you."

They arose then, and left the pavilion, and in a little while were seated on Schieffler's piazza, with a table and tasty lunch between them.

This hotel, under the charge of a sturdy respectable German couple, commands a fine view of the old Atlantic, with the Atlantic Highlands in the distance.

It was not until lunch was over, and Dick had, with Miss Braddock's permission, lit a cigar, that he broached the subject of interest to both.

"Now, Miss Braddock," he said, "you have admitted that Jack Flack threatened you?"

"Yes, sir."

"He told you that you were laboring under a ban of suspicion—that Trumbull Braddock, your esteemed employer, had robbed, both by forgery, and actual theft—that he, Flack, was in a position to prove that you, and perhaps sundry other persons, were concerned in this daring scheme?"

"Mr. Bristol!"

"Well?"

"How in the name of all that is wonderful, can you know this?"

"Do I know it?"

"You seem to, for you repeat almost his exact words. Yet, you were not near enough to hear?"

"You saw me, then, before I supposed you did?"

"Yes, and was terrified. I thought you was in league with Jack Flack!"

"I see. Well, I hardly wonder at it. Flack told you that you were irretrievably in his power, and that, unless you gave him a certain sum of money, he would denounce you to your uncle, cause your arrest, and have you sent to prison for a term of years?"

"Yes, Mr. Bristol, he did. But I cannot fathom how you should know this!"

"You shall know in due time. Now, what was Flack's demand—how were you to pay him money?"

"You know I work for my uncle, and receive twenty dollars a week for my services?"

"Well?"

"Jack Flack demands that I pay him fifteen of that twenty every Saturday night."

"The scoundrel! If you don't, what then?"

"He will cause my arrest and that of my dear mother; to bring forward witnesses to prove that I have not only forged my uncle's name, but have actually been found in his house under suspicious circumstances of robbery."

"And, do you for an instant think he can do this?"

"I don't see how, for I am wholly innocent. But he is a desperate villain, and you know on the witness stand the majority of witnesses determine the evidence."

"Thank God, not always. Do you think Mrs. Braddock would swear against you—and Nola, too?"

"He intimidated as much!"

Dick was silent a moment; then he said: "You need have no fear of Flack or the others. Your innocence in the plot is already evident to me, and that means more than you may suppose. I already know who are the guilty ones, and you need have no further apprehensions, if you will let me direct you."

"Mr. Bristol, there is no need of questioning that. You have proven yourself to be a gentleman and a man of honor, such as I believed you to be, at first sight. Whatever you direct in this hour of trouble I will cheerfully comply with. Only, I would not like—"

"This to get to Mr. Westlake's hearing?"

She blushed prettily, but remained silent. "I understand," Dick went on, "and if my good will and wishes are of any moment, they will be with you two, ever. He is worthy of you, and you of him; so be of good cheer. Now, Mr. Braddock will be here soon, and I shall take you before him, and introduce you in a new

light. I have been forbidden to say to you what I wish to say. If you can keep a secret, I will give you one that may cheer you even more than what I have yet told you. Where is your father?"

"Alas! I do not know. Mamma has forbidden me to mention him, because she said it grieved her to the very soul to think of the past."

"You have never had any intimation whether he is living or dead?"

"No. I have been kept in utter ignorance of my birth, as if it were a disgraceful thing to speak of. I have never questioned my mother's discretion in letting my past and hers rest in oblivion, simply because she has been a dear, good mother to me, and slaved to make something of me, until she has broken her health, and I am now her sole support."

"Poor woman!" Dick said, half-aloud. Then aloud he added: "I guess I will postpone saying anything more concerning this matter. Better leave it to your mother to explain, and save you the shock of being told by a stranger."

"No! no! no!" Lillian cried, hastily. "I would rather you would tell me. For years I have longed to know my past—my parentage, but have been denied. 'You will know all one day, child,' mother has said; but it has been poor satisfaction. I have never, in my humble way, had the courage to regard myself as anybody. I wonder sometimes I have ever had the audacity to receive any attentions from the man I love—Mr. Westlake. Be I even of unacknowledged parentage, Mr. Bristol, tell me, for I can bear the shame rather than the suspense that has thus far followed me through life like a haunting phantom."

"Promise me to keep sacred what I reveal, and you shall know all."

"I promise, Mr. Bristol."

"Very well. I do not doubt but what you will keep your word. Your father is Trumbull Braddock!"

"What! Mr. Bristol, you do not mean it?"

"I do. He told me so with his own lips. But listen: I have gone so far, you may as well know the rest."

He then told her, briefly and to the point, what Trumbull Braddock had revealed to him.

Lillian listened eagerly—drank in every word with painful solicitude.

When he had finished, she did not betray the emotion he had expected.

"Thank God!" she said, "that it is no worse!"

"Of what relation have you been led to suppose you were to Flack?"

"He my step-father, and I my mother's child by a previous marriage. I had always borne my mother's maiden name until I went to work for Mr. Braddock; then mamma told me that I must go to uncle, and he would give me employment, and that my name was Braddock."

"How have you been treated by the present Mrs. Braddock?"

"Shamefully, although she and her children took good care to treat me with kindness in the presence of Mr. Braddock. It was a matter well understood between us, I think, that we hated each other. I never gave them an inch of opportunity for hostility, as I thought, but they managed to make it decidedly unpleasant for me."

"No doubt about that. Miss Braddock, where does your mother live? Matters may shape themselves in her favor, and if so, I shall have occasion to call upon her."

"My mother would not want to be brought into this strange affair. She is in very poor health, and the trouble would injure her."

"There will be no trouble that she will be concerned in. In other words, I hope to be able to prove that Theodora Braddock has no legal claim upon your father. In which case I am confident Mr. Braddock will gladly return to his first love, and even though he may not be able to take her back as his wife while Flack lives, she will be well provided for."

"Mother would not accept a cent of Mr. Braddock's money, except I had worked for it," Lillian declared, with spirit. "However, I don't know that there can be any harm of my telling you mother's address, since you have been so kind to me. She lives at number —, Eighth street, New York. She has an attic room, and lives under the name of Mrs. Hoon. She is an invalid, and seldom leaves the house."

"Does Flack live there?"

"No. He has not seen mother for a year—does not know where she is. I have sheltered and protected her from his violence, even at the cost of being beaten myself. I have had to avoid going to mother for weeks at a time, believing that he was shadowing me."

"Very well. I need not inquire further at present. Your answers have been satisfactory, and the only thing I want now is to keep out of Flack's sight, until I can nail him, and prevent him from bothering any one any more. You say you know the landlady of this place?"

"Yes."

"Then make arrangements to stay here for the present, and I will call for you when you are wanted. Keep out of sight of chance guests as much as possible, and don't worry yourself in the least."

"How long will I have to stay, Mr. Bristol? You know I cannot well afford to lose my employment."

"Certainly not. I will arrange for all that with your father. If you need any money, I will arrange that also."

"No, thanks, I have sufficient for the present, but, you know, I have come down with Mr. Westlake and Sadie Sands, and I fear they will be very much worried if they do not find me."

"Oh, that will be all right! I will see Westlake, very likely, and make any necessary explanation. In the mean time you can make your arrangements here, and I will call on you as soon as matters have assumed a definite shape."

And so they parted.

Lillian secured accommodations at the hotel, and Dick returned to the busy part of West Brighton, to watch the ocean, and deliberate upon his next course of action.

CHAPTER X.

VOICES IN THE BACK ROOM.

It was somewhat after six o'clock that evening, after taking a dip in the surf, that Dick left Doyle's bathing palace, with an idea of walking along the Concourse, as far as the Brighton Beach Hotel.

The gay equipages were flitting to and fro on Boulevard and Concourse, and he thought that possibly he might see the Cayvan equipage among them.

Nor was he disappointed in this.

He had gone but a little way up the Concourse, when he saw a team of runaway horses, attached to a phaeton, wheels suddenly out of the Boulevard, and come tearing toward him.

They were running at full speed, despite the driver's efforts to check their mad career, and injury and death to occupants of other vehicles then upon the Concourse was imminent.

The driver, whom Dick recognized as him of the Cayvan turnout—the count himself—appeared utterly paralyzed with terror.

There was no time for deliberation. A woman and child were crossing the Concourse, within a few yards of the coming team, the phaeton was careening from side to side, threatening to spill out its occupants at any instant.

The many other pedestrians who were crossing the drive, set up a screeching, and scattered in every direction.

It took but an instant for Dick to comprehend the deadly peril of the woman and child before referred to, and, without waiting to think of the consequences to himself, he dashed out into the thoroughfare, to check the runaways, and, though they rushed upon him with maddening speed, he grasped them firmly by the bits, but not until they had dragged him nearly a block, did he succeed in bringing them to a standstill, without any particular damage to himself.

The moment the team halted, Count Cayvan sprang off the driver's seat, and approached the detective with extended hand.

"By Heaven, young man, you are one hero!" he cried, "and you shall have my lifetime gratitude for your brave act. Whom have I the honor of addressing, pray, for I would know more of one who would so risk his life to save that of others."

"You may call me Richards," Dick replied, "but I must decline to be called a hero for stopping your horses, as it was but what any man would have undertaken under the circumstances."

"Nonsense! Why I'll wager there's not another man along the Concourse who would have run the risk you did—not even a policeman. So come, now, jump into the phaeton and I'll drive you out to Elkmere, my country place, and we will lunch together, and crack a bottle of old Madeira, while you tell me of yourself. Any man as brave as you must surely have an interesting history."

"I never speak of myself," Dick demurred, "and so you really will have to excuse me."

"Not much, I won't! You shall lunch with me at any rate, and I will drive you back here in the cool of the evening. I shall be alone this evening, my wife and children having gone to

Manhattan Beach, so there is nothing in the world to hinder you."

Now, Dick really wished to accept the invitation, for he had no doubt but what it would be the means of his making some new discoveries; so, as he was not likely to encounter Nola or Vanderbilt Braddock, he finally consented to accompany the count.

They entered the phaeton and drove briskly along the Boulevard countryward.

The runaways were by this time thoroughly quieted down, and there was no more immediate trouble to be feared from them, unless they should again take fright.

The Boulevard was crowded with pleasure vehicles of all descriptions, and there were numerous ladies and gentlemen on horseback.

All was life and gayety incarnate to the exterior view, but Dick wondered how many of them held dead secrets under all this smiling, or had grim skeletons locked up in their family closets.

Count Cayvan was quite chatty as they spun along, but refrained from saying anything in particular concerning himself. He pointed out the houses and other objects of interest, as they passed, and nodded occasionally to men he met.

It was quite dusk when they arrived at Elkmere.

It was a substantial country villa, situated upon a branch road running northward from the Boulevard.

There was nothing strikingly pretentious about it. It was but one of hundreds of pretty residences scattered over the length and breadth of Long Island.

The horses were fastened to a hitching-post outside the spacious lawn and then Dick was conducted into the parlor, and given a seat, Count Cayvan excusing himself long enough to prepare the lunch, for he said, apologetically:

"When I invite any one to break fast with me, I always look after the preparation of the lunch, personally."

Of course Dick excused him, and was then left to himself.

The parlor, as in most country houses, was in the extreme front, and connected with a rear parlor by folding-doors, which were usually kept closed, evidently, for a sofa occupied a place before them on the parlor side.

The dining-room, kitchen, and so forth, were disconnected from the two parlors by a spacious hallway, that ran the full length of the house.

The parlor into which Dick had been conducted was well but not extravagantly furnished, and, after a few glances about it, the visitor came to the conclusion that there was nothing there of interest to him.

He was mistaken, however.

The sofa by the folding-doors directly attracted his attention, and he approached it.

It was an antique affair, very heavy and cumbersome. It had evidently been built a century or more ago, in times when more timber was put in a set of furniture than is required to make two sets nowadays.

It was while he was examining this piece of furniture that Dick's attention was attracted by voices in the adjoining room—loud and angry voices, too.

"I say I cannot, and will not!" a woman's voice cried. "I've stood this sort of thing until I can stand it no longer!"

"How are you going to help yourself?" the coarse, sneering voice of a man demanded. "You've got no alternative, as I kin see, my fair sister! You're completely hemmed in, on both sides, and turn which way you will, you're bound to run into the grasp of the law. And once you get into it, how are you to get out?"

"I can at least end my own life!" the woman said, bitterly, "and that would be better than all this persecution."

"Persecution be blowed! I am not persecuting you. I caught you in a crime, by which you are realizing money, and demanded my share!"

"You've had your share, and more than your share!"

"Can't help that. I want more. Money should always be made while the sun shines, and I'm in for making my pile, now."

"Jack, I tell you I have no more money. I gave you the very last I had this morning."

"Git out! When I arrived here, a bit ago, you were about startin' for Manhattan Beach! You're not one o' the kind to go there broke, where one can't look cross-eyed short o' a fiver!"

"I tell you I haven't any money, Jack."

"Go squeeze the count, then. He's got lots of hoodle."

"Not for the world would I ask my husband for money. Besides, he is not here. He started off for West Brighton, before you came."

"That makes no difference. You know where he keeps his money."

"He always carries with him what he has, except what he keeps in a bank."

"Ah! he does, hey? Well, a man who puts on the lugs he does ought to carry a good-sized hoodle about his duds. I'll bear it in memory, so that if I should ever meet him, I'd ask him after the state of his health."

"Jack Flack, you are a brute and a ruffian, and no brother of mine. If you ever try to rob my husband I hope he will shoot you dead."

"Oh! I shall take good care not to let him get a chance for that, if I ever tackle him, my dear sister. I ain't taking so many chances of getting shot, now, as I used to did, when I was a free rover of the main. All my business, nowadays, is conducted strictly on a safe basis."

"So now, look here. Business is business, and there's no use of dodging around the bush any longer. I want a thousand dollars, and must have it to gamble with on the races. Come, now, do I have it, or not?"

"Oh, Jack, I tell you it is impossible—at least to-night, for I have no means in my power of raising such a sum."

"Well, can I have it to-morrow?"

"I don't know; oh! I don't know! I will try, but I don't see, for the life of me, where the money is to come from."

"Nonsense. Make out a check to me, signed and indorsed by Trumbull Braddock, and I've no fear but what I can get it cashed at the Seaman's Bank, where I am known."

"And get arrested for it!"

"Never fear. Once I get hold of the sugar, I'll get well out of New York."

"I dare not try the thing again!" the woman said. "Already detectives are looking for the guilty ones, and I cannot imperil myself more than I have done."

"Humph! It can't matter much. You're sure to be nabbed sooner or later, and one more haul could not make much difference. If I don't get the money, I shall expose you to both Braddock and Cayvan, anyhow. So, there's simply one of two alternatives—arrest and double disgrace, or get me the money."

There was a brief silence; then the woman's voice said:

"Promise one thing faithfully, and the money shall be yours to-morrow night!"

"What do you want me to promise?"

"That, if I get you more than one thousand—maybe as much as two thousand—you will leave this part of the country, and never bother me again, nor attempt to cause my arrest! Now, Jack, be part of a man, anyhow, and give me a show."

"Two thousand, hey! No, I reckon I don't take that. If I deal with Cayvan, I reckon he'll give me double that to have the matter hushed up, and keep you out o' jail. Tell ye what I'll do, though: I don't want to be too hard on you, sence you're my sister; so if you'll make it five thousand, I'll swear to leave the country, and never bother you again, or betray any of your secrets."

"How do I know you will keep your oath?"

"I swear by that reverence I have ever cherished for our dead mother, even villain that I have been."

"Very well. You had better go now. I will meet you to-morrow night on the beach, half a mile below Red Leary's old place at West Brighton."

"Mind you, et won't be best fer ye to practice any deception!"

"Certainly not. I will meet you there, whether I succeed in raising all the money or not!"

Then the listener in the front parlor heard footsteps, and the voices altogether.

And what had he not heard?

By the chance of stopping a runaway team of horses, he had been enabled to obtain a corroboration of all his suspicions against Theodore Braddock, alias Mademoiselle Celeste De Ramza, alias Madame Cayvan, alias Polly Pilgrim!

CHAPTER XI.

THE COUNT'S ROMANCE.

It was full half an hour later, when Count Cayvan entered the parlor where Deadwood Dick was waiting, and was directly followed by a servant, who brought in a game, pastry and wine lunch, such as only an expert French chef is competent to get up.

We will not enter into the details of the menu, more than to say that it was such a repast as Deadwood Dick had never before sat down to.

But, somehow, he did not fully enjoy it, for it kept occurring to him that he was really partaking of the count's hospitality more as a detective and spy than as a guest.

There was one thing, however, that gave him some assurance—that the count knew nothing of his wife's criminal character. The words of Jack Flack seemed to imply this.

The count was less chatty, during the repast, than he had previously been. Although he evidently tried to fill the position of host, graciously, it was plain he did not enter joyously into the spirit of the occasion.

"You own this place, I presume?" Dick said, as they sat conversing over the wine.

"Indeed, no. I simply leased it, with furniture and stud, for two months, while the owner is away in Europe. My time is up next week; then, I shall return to Europe and take my family with me."

"I infer, then, that your family has not been recently living with you on the other side?"

"No, indeed! Until a few months ago, I had not seen my wife, before, in twenty years! And more—I never saw my children until I came to America."

"Indeed? Why, how could that be?"

"Well, it is rather a romantic story."

"I should like to hear it, if you have no objections to relating it," Dick remarked.

"Oh! Certainly not! It might seem somewhat incredible to some, but I can vouch for the truth of my story."

"When I was a boy I was left a large fortune, both in landed estate and money. As I approached my majority, my father and mother became very strict with me, and planned for me to marry a rich countess, nearly old enough to be my mother. I had no notion of anything of the sort, and the day I became my own master, I married Mademoiselle Celeste De Ramza, a ballet dancer—a mere chit of a girl, yet winsome, loving and respectable."

"I kept this marriage a secret for a month; then it leaked out and there was a great scandal. Celeste suddenly disappeared, and report had it that she had eloped with a *maitre de ballet*. And about the same time, before I had had time to form any plans, I found myself suddenly drafted into the army and marched off to the front."

"Well, I served my time, and when I came out of the army, I searched for my Celeste, but, all to no avail. After that I wandered about the world, here, there and everywhere. The Franco-Prussian war had robbed me of my estates, but I still had money left."

"I was finally arrested, in Russia, as a suspicious character and packed off to Siberia, where I was held a prisoner until a year ago, when the French interested themselves, and secured my liberation. On my return to Paris, my name was mentioned in the papers, and my bride of twenty years before, now in America, saw it, and wrote to me. As a result, I came to America, a matter of nine months ago, and met my wife in Philadelphia."

"There I learned from her that she had been abducted by her own father, and spirited away to this country, at the instance of my father, who had paid a large sum to have the thing done. Since I came across, my wife and I have lived quietly within our means, until I took this villa."

"Well, how about your children?"

"Oh! they were born, twins, shortly after my wife came to America, and are being educated in New York. I see but little of them on this account, but am very proud of them."

Dick was silent a few minutes—quite at a loss what to do.

Should he go on, and expose to the count the deception that had been practiced upon him?

Or, should he wait until he first saw Trumbull Braddock?

In truth, he hardly knew what to do.

If Cayvan had faith enough to come back to his wife, after a separation of nearly twenty years, would he believe in anything that might be said against her now?

It was not probable he would.

So, after deliberation, Dick resolved to keep all that he had learned to himself, until he should consult with Trumbull Braddock.

Perhaps the merchant would be so glad to get rid of the designing woman as not to prosecute her, but to drive her from the country.

When it came nine o'clock, Dick suggested that he be driven back to West Brighton, to which the count assented, and, an hour later, they separated in front of Paul Bauer's, the count returning to Elkmere.

As for the detective, he had other matters to attend to yet that night.

He expected Billy Bucket and Trumbull

Braddock down, probably by a late train, but, as there was no certainty about which route they would come, Dick concluded to go to Thompson's Hotel, to there await their arrival.

Thompson's is one of the oldest hotels on the island, and to reach it, from the Concourse, one has to travel a considerable distance along a walk, boarded up high on either side. It is not a very pleasant place to pass through, late at night, especially owing to its contiguity to that delectable neighborhood, "The Gut."

It was after eleven o'clock when Dick finally entered the alley, en route for Thompson's.

The last trains were leaving for New York, and the scene on the beach was beginning to wane, until another day came, to bring a new crowd of pleasure-seekers.

The alley was only faintly lighted with the rays of one smoky lamp, when Dick entered it.

"Egad! this is a capital trap for a fellow to get sand-bagged and robbed in," he muttered, grimly, involuntarily feeling in his pocket to see if his revolver was in its accustomed place.

Seeing no one in front of him, however, he proceeded forward, but he had gone only about half the length of the walk, when he heard a sharp cry, and an oath, a little way ahead.

"Hal trouble!" ejaculated Dick, and drawing his revolver, he rushed forward to where an old gentleman was in the act of scrambling to his feet.

"Jerusalem! It's Trumbull Braddock!" was Dick's exclamation.

"Yes, so it is!" growled the old man, groping around in search of his specs, "and who the deuce are you?"

"Why, I'm Bristol. What's the matter? Did you fall?"

"No!" with a sniff of displeasure. "I dropped! Some one hit me a crack with a stuffed club, and knocked me down. I reckon I'd 'a' been robbed, only my assailant must have heard you coming and took leg bail for security."

"Who was he—what did he look like?"

"I only got one glimpse of him, before he made me see stars. In that glimpse I saw that he had an ugly scar across his forehead."

"Jack Flack, I'll bet! That answers his description. Well, he's escaped, so we might as well go back to the hotel. Where did you leave Billy Bucket?"

"He left me as soon as we arrived here and I haven't seen him since."

When they reached the hotel they went to the room the merchant had engaged—a very comfortable one, looking seaward.

"Now, then," Braddock said, when they were seated, "why am I summoned here, and what's it all about, anyhow?"

"It means that I have found the author of your losses—the Miss Polly Pilgrim, who has been fleecing you out of certain sums of money lately."

"The deuce you have! Well, where is she?"

"Oh! not far off!"

"Then you have arrested her?"

"No, not yet. I wanted to see you personally. I thought perhaps you might wish to avoid the scandal of an arrest."

"I see. Go on! Who is this woman? Out with it, and the full particulars. I am prepared to hear the worst."

"Well," said Dick, "so far as Polly Pilgrim is concerned personally, she is a fiction. The woman who has been playing you for a ten-pin is the one whom I half suspected, after my visit to your house. Her maiden name was probably Flack, as Jack Flack calls her his sister. Later on she was a ballet dancer in Paris, where she married one Count Cayvan. She was separated from the count by her parents, who brought her to America, where she must have soon after married you. Cayvan came to America some nine months ago, and since then your supposed wife has been living with him again as his wife. Cayvan even thinks Nola and Vanderbilt are his children."

"He is mistaken. They were both born over a year after my marriage with the woman. But, even admitting that what you have said is true, how do you make it out that my wife is connected with the forgeries and theft?"

"To give a right impression, let me begin at the beginning. Then you will understand."

And begin at the beginning he did, rehearsing what the merchant already knew, and adding other points; how he had enlisted Billy Bucket in his service, and with what success Billy had shadowed Flack; how he, Dick, had visited Cayvan's house, overheard what transpired between Mrs. Cayvan and Flack, and afterward dined with the count, and heard his romantic story; also, other minor details already known to the reader.

"Well," the merchant said, when Dick had finished, "it seems that you have succeeded in working the whole infernal thing out. You are one of ten thousand, Bristol, and you shall be paid accordingly. You believe that Count Cayvan is ignorant of the woman's baseness?"

"I do. I do not think he suspects that she was ever married to you, nor that she has been engaged in any crooked work. However, that is only my opinion. What remains to be done it rests with you to say. If you are ready to swear out warrants for the arrest of your wife, son and daughter, why, I am ready to serve them."

"I must have time to think. Do you think that Vanderbilt and Nola are concerned in this conspiracy?"

"I do. Have they not known their mother was in America, and visited her? Did they not both lie to you concerning the pawned stud? Who else in your household, could you, now, with more reason suspect, than they, of the mysterious thefts from your private office?"

"True! true! They are as guilty as their mother. It's a terrible disgraceful mess, all around. Before I can issue any further orders, I must see Cayvan, and talk with him. See that he is sent for, in the morning."

"Very well, sir. I will now bid you good-night, and go hunt up my youthful partner."

So bidding the old gentleman good-night, Dick left the room.

He had no difficulty in finding Billy, and together they hunted up lodgings, for both were greatly fatigued. To-morrow would probably end their Coney Island detective case.

CHAPTER XII.

ROBBED.

DICK was up at dawn, the next morning, and, after a dip in the surf, he and Billy had breakfasted at a restaurant.

Almost the first person he saw, on emerging from their repast, was Count Cayvan, who was walking rapidly, and appeared greatly excited.

"Hello, Richards!" he cried, spying the detective. "You're the very one I hoped to see. Where will I find a police station, around these parts?"

"Give it up. Haven't seen one, yet, tho' I presume there is some sort of a calaboose. What's the matter—want to get yourself locked up?"

"No! I've been robbed—robbed of every cent I have in the world!"

"The deuce you say! Sit down here, and let's hear about it. I am a detective, and perhaps I can help you even better than the police, who are but bunglers, at the best."

They stepped into a little pavilion, and became seated, Cayvan dropping upon his chair, weak and faint, thoroughly exhausted, from his intense excitement.

"Yes," he gasped, "and there is no clew to who robbed me. Last night, after leaving you, I soon retired, my wife having already returned from Manhattan Beach. As usual, on retiring, I placed my money in a bureau drawer, and locked the drawer. I had more on hand than usual, last night, having two days previously withdrawn my account from the Brooklyn bank with which I had been dealing."

"When I awoke, this morning I found that I had been robbed. My bureau drawer was open, and so were the shutters of my window that I had closed, on retiring. Leaning against the window-sill, on the outside of the house, was the ladder I had seen used about the premises. The door of my room was not unlocked; the burglar must have entered by way of the ladder."

"Where was your wife when you awoke?"

"In bed, fast asleep."

"Did she hear nothing during the night?"

"Nothing whatever. A dozen burglars might enter the room without her knowledge when she is asleep."

"Did you question the household?"

"Yes."

"With what result?"

"The entire household retired late, and all slept soundly. No one heard any disturbance."

"How much money did you lose, sir?"

"Seven thousand and two hundred dollars."

"In what shape?"

"It was in my money-belt, in denominations of ten, twenty and fifty-dollar notes."

"Have you no suspicions?"

"No, I have not. I am utterly nonplused."

"Just so. Mr. Cayvan, you took me home to lunch?"

"I did."

"Behind the parlor into which you took me, is another room?"

"Yes."

"Who occupied that room while you were preparing lunch?"

"My wife; but I was not aware of it until the servant told me, just before your lunch was brought in. Then I concluded to mention nothing about the matter."

"You are aware that she had company?"

"Yes, her brother—a hangdog sort of rascal, whom I have repeatedly forbidden her to see. But, go on, sir."

"Well, I overheard a conversation between your wife and this man Flack. He possessed a secret knowledge of some crooked business she has been engaged in—a sort of thing that would send her to State Prison. Unless your wife would raise him a certain sum of money at once, he threatened to expose her both to you and to Trumbull Braddock!"

"Who is he?"

"The American husband—the victim of her baseness, who, for nearly a score of years, has believed her to be his wife, and with whom she has lived as her lawful husband up to nine months ago, when, as he supposed, he sent her to travel in Europe. Instead, she has been living with you, and those children you have been led to believe were yours, are, in reality, the children of Mr. Braddock, born over a year after Celeste arrived in America, or, at least after she was married to Braddock."

"I am not prepared to believe all this!" Cayvan declared, with decision. "May I ask where you have acquired all of this wonderful information? Surely not from an interview you may have chanced to overhear between my wife and Flack?"

"No, not altogether. As I told you, I am a detective. I am employed by the before-mentioned Mr. Braddock to trace out the author of a number of swindles that have been perpetrated upon him."

"After making certain investigations not necessary now for me to relate, I found that Mrs. Braddock was not in Europe, but, on the contrary, was residing in America, and by device of forgery and theft, and aided and abetted by her son and daughter, was swindling her husband, Mr. B., out of large sums of money."

"It took me but a short time to locate her, and hence it was that when you chanced to invite me to lunch with you, I went with the firm hope of discovering something. And I was not disappointed."

"I found that Flack also possessed your wife's secret, and was working her out of all the hush-money possible."

"The scoundrel!"

"That sounds like a pet name for him. He is even worse. He and your wife wrangled about money, and he threatened to expose her, and hand her over to the law if he didn't get it."

"Well?"

"Well, he wanted a thousand dollars, but she hadn't got it. He bid her to resort again to forgery, but she was afraid to. Finally they struck a bargain. By his promising never to make a further demand on her for money, she was to meet him to-night, and pay him five thousand dollars."

"So there you see, sir, you have it all in a nut-shell."

"By the gods! You are right," ejaculated the Frenchman, excitedly, springing to his feet, and pacing to and fro. "The evil genius that worked upon my boyish passions has even made a dupe of me, after twenty years. 'Gad! I'll murder her, once I get hands upon her. Come! Arouse! No time must be lost. She must be arrested before she has time to escape.'"

"I do not think there is cause for alarm on that score. She was at Elkmere when you left?"

"Yes."

"Very sorry for your loss, I suppose?"

"Yes, in hysterics!"

"I presumed so. I don't think she will attempt to run away."

"Why not?"

"Because she will not think you could possibly suspect or prove anything against her, and will believe herself safer in remaining quietly with you than trying to escape."

"Maybe you are right. But what is to prevent her immediate arrest?"

"Nothing particularly, only that Mr. Braddock is here, and would like to see you, before any pronounced move is made. If you two were to consult together, you could probably come to some understanding as to what is best to do."

"There's no question of 'best' about it!" Cayvan declared, grimly. "That woman has robbed and disgraced me, and, curse her! she shall pay the penalty of her folly to the law! However, I will see this Braddock. Where is he?"

"You will find him at Thompson's. You had better go and see him, and by the time you're through with your visit, I shall be in readiness to accompany you to Elkmere. I will also wire the Brooklyn police to be on the lookout for your wife in case she should have flown."

"All right. This Braddock understands the circumstances—?"

"Everything."

"All right. I'll meet you here in half an hour."

And then the count hastened away.

"My! but his mad is up now!" chuckled Billy.

"He took it far more calmly than I expected!" Dick replied, lighting a cigar.

"We weren't long workin' up the case, hey, boss?"

"No, thanks to you, Billy, we have not been long at it. In fact, I think it is about the quickest case I ever won."

"And I suppose when you're through with it, ye won't hev anything more fer me to do, an' I kin go back ter blackin' boots?"

"Not necessarily. You are old enough and smart enough to find some more lucrative employment than boot shining."

"Where will you be goin'?"

"That's as uncertain as the shifting of the wind," Dick replied. "I may be in Halifax a week hence, or at the South Pole."

"Well, wherever you emigrate, I follers, providin' I kin raise the sugar!" Mr. Bucket announced, with evident earnestness.

They then visited the telegraph station, and Dick sent alarms to Brooklyn and Bay Ridge, to have a lookout for Mrs. Cayvan; after which they returned to the pavilion, and found Trumbull Braddock and Count Cayvan awaiting them.

"We have thoroughly discussed the situation," the count said, "and decide that the arrest must be made. But it must be done somewhat different from the ordinary way."

"How do you mean?" Dick demanded.

"Well, if we were to all go to Elkmere together, my wife would naturally see us coming, and take alarm. Seeing that it was all up with her, I fear that she would baffle us."

"How?"

"By suicide. I know her so well, that I believe she would prefer death to imprisonment."

"I hardly agree with you there, but you may be correct in your surmise," Dick replied.

"What then, is your plan?"

"This: I will send a messenger to her, with a note, telling her that I have been badly injured, and directing her to come at once to Thompson's hotel. On her arrival here we will confront her."

"Do you think she will come?"

"I haven't a doubt of it."

"Very well. Write out the note, and I will take it myself," Dick said. "Here, Billy, you go and hunt me up a saddle-horse, as quick as you can."

Billy hastened away, and, after a short delay, returned with a spirited animal, saddled, and ready for the trail.

By this time the note was written, and putting it in his pocket, Dick vaulted into the saddle, bade his friends good-by, and galloped away.

More than one admiring glance was sent after the young man, for few Eastern horsemen could ride with the grace and ease of this Prince of the West, and certain it is that no one liked a horseback ride more than he.

Reared in the saddle, as he literally had been, his keen sense of love for the chase came natural.

CHAPTER XIII.

A DECIDED WIND-UP.

THE Boulevard that leads from Coney Island to Brooklyn, is a fine one, dotted on either side with imposing residences and magnificent estates, and is certainly a delightful stretch for an early morning ride.

Dick allowed his horse to take an easy canter, while he drank in of the beautiful scenes that flitted by him.

He was an ardent admirer of nature, both in its wild Western type and in its Eastern picturesqueness. He liked the fields, the hills, the trees, the silvery streams, one and all.

It was not until he had turned from the noble

drive, into the country road that led to Elkmere, that he began to feel a sense of unrest, and accordingly spurred his horse into a swifter pace.

Elkmere lay still several miles away. What if, when he should reach his destination, he should find that the game had flown?

Then he should blame himself for not having hastened to Elkmere sooner.

On he dashed, and eventually entered a grove, where the overhanging branches quite overshadowed the road.

He had not ridden more than half-way through the timber, when he saw a puff of smoke issue from a thicket, heard a sharp report, and a bullet whizzed by him, uncomfortably close to his head.

Putting spurs to his horse he dashed on, looking back as he did so.

He had not gone far when he saw a man emerge from cover, rifle in hand—none other than Jack Flack!

"Ha! he must know who and what I am!" Dick mused. "Either that, or he proposed to kill and rob me. You wait! Mr. Flack. I've only a short-range revolver with me now, but I'll get a crack at you yet, you miserable scoundrel!"

Flack did not attempt to follow the horseman, but strode off in the opposite direction, while Dick kept upon his course, and in due time he reached Elkmere.

The house had a very quiet appearance; not a person or sign of any one's presence was apparent.

"I'll bet she's vamoosed!" was Dick's worded apprehension.

He dismounted, hitched his horse, and hurried up the graveled walk to the house.

The door was supplied with an old-fashioned brass knocker, and this Dick applied with a vengeance.

Presently his summons was answered by a frowny-headed Irish girl.

"I want to see your mistress immediately!" Dick said.

"She isn't in, sor."

"Isn't in? Where is she? Speak up! I have an important message for her!"

"She isn't in, sor!"

"Where is she, confound your stupidity!"

"I don't know, sor."

"You don't know? Why, she was here this morning?"

"Yis, sor?"

"Then, where did she go?"

"On a horse, sor."

Dick uttered an exclamation perhaps more forcible than polite.

"Get away!" he said, pushing into the house.

"I'll soon find out whether she is here or not!" He then proceeded to scour the rooms from cellar to garret, but no Mrs. Cayvan was to be found, nor any one else, for that matter, but the stupid servant.

On a dressing-bureau in one of the bed-chambers, however, Dick found a letter addressed to Count Cayvan. This he pocketed.

"When did your mistress leave?" he demanded of the girl.

"I don't know, sor."

"Was it last night or this morning?"

"This morning, sor."

"At what hour?"

"I don't know, sor."

"Why don't you know? Don't you know anything, you idiot?"

"I didn't look at the clock, sor."

"Did the son and daughter accompany your mistress?"

"No, sor."

"Where did they go?"

"They went to Brooklyn last noight, sor."

"In which way did your mistress go when she left here?"

"I don't know, sor."

"Didn't you see her ride away?"

"No, sor."

"Why not?"

"Beca'se I was towld not to!" Bridget replied, with the same stolidness of purpose to keep a secret.

Seeing there was nothing more to be gained by questioning, Dick concluded the best thing to do was to hasten back to Coney Island, and consult the two husbands of one wife.

First, however, he visited the stable, and found that one of the stalls was empty, which seemed to corroborate the maid's statement that the madam had taken her flight on horseback.

Mounting again, Dick sped back to Coney Island as fast as possible, and found Braddock, Cayvan and Billy anxiously waiting for him.

"Too late! The game has fled on horseback," Dick announced, dismounting. "Here is a letter, however. It may explain."

He gave it to the count, who hastily tore it open and perused it. It ran as follows:

"COUNT:—I have taken your money, and with my children, fled—no one will ever know where. I could not remain behind and bear imprisonment, so there was nothing else for me to do but flee. I had deceived both you and Trumbull Braddock, and could no longer lay claim to even your clemency, and would not bring the disgrace of publicity upon you both. So, good-by. You both are too honorable men to be compromised by me, and I hope you may drop me entirely out of your memories. Good-by forever. CELESTE."

The count read this message first to himself, and then aloud.

"Great riddance to bad rubbish!" exclaimed Billy Bucket. "I'd let her go to Halifax if I war you, boss!"

The count smiled, grimly, at the boy's assumption.

"Well," he said, "perhaps the lad's advice is the most sensible"—turning to Mr. Braddock—"though the loss of the money temporarily ruins me."

"Yes, let her go!" the merchant assented. "We are both better off to be rid of her, and, so glad am I, that I will be only too happy to give you any temporary assistance you may need."

"As for the two detectives here, Cayvan, we owe them, I consider, an everlasting debt of gratitude over and above a good round pecuniary compensation. And the latter, they shall have, if I have to sell out one of my mills!"

"I guess that will not be necessary," Dick laughed. "If we were to charge you by the day, our combined time would not exceed a week!"

"True, but in that week, you have relieved Cayvan and me of a curse of years standing. Yours has indeed been a double-quick triumph, and I shall not fail to inform Byrnes, when I see him, of the whole story."

"I am but as a drop to a gallon, compared with the inspector," Dick replied, modestly; "but I shall be pleased to have the chief know that the case he committed to me was not botched."

Little remains to be said to add to the completion of this one of many detective cases which the police never get hold of.

That same day Mr. Braddock, Lillian, Count Cayvan, Dick, and Billy Bucket returned to New York, and Dick and Billy each received a substantial reward for their services.

About a week later a supposed tramp was killed by a railway train in Connecticut.

The description of the man, with his scar-face, tallied so well with that of Jack, that, at the instance of Braddock, Dick went to investigate.

The victim of the accident was indeed Flack, horribly mangled. He evidently had taken to flight in a tramp disguise and so met his doom.

His death removed the barrier between Trumbull Braddock and Margaret, Lillian's mother, when least expected; accordingly, the merchant purchased a new home in a neighboring city where his family affairs were unknown, and there installed Lillian and her mother.

A quiet divorce from the treacherous Celeste, and a remarriage to Margaret brought peace and happiness to the much-tried man and much-wronged woman.

Here, before his return westward, Deadwood Dick had the pleasure of seeing Lillian married to Walter Westlake.

Pretty Sadie Sands has made a new "mash" on the count, whom Mr. Braddock has taken into his employ, as foreign correspondent, and there's no telling what may be the outcome.

Having satisfied his appetite for seaside recreation, Deadwood Dick once more turned his face westward, with Leadville his objective destination.

And Billy Bucket?

The gamin went with Dick—a gamin no longer, but an embryo "chief," in his own fond dreams. Dick's advice for him to go to school Billy positively declined to accept. Where his "boss" went there he would follow! To which decision Dick smilingly assented.

THE END.

Beadle's Dime Library.

BY EDWARD WILLETT.

- 129 Mississippi Mose; or, a Strong Man's Sacrifice.
- 209 Buck Farley, the Bonanza Prince.
- 222 Bill the Blizzard; or, Red Jack's Crime.
- 248 Montana Nat, the Lion of Last Chance Camp.
- 274 Flush Fred, the Mississippi Sport.
- 289 Flush Fred's Full Hand.
- 298 L. gzer Lem; or, Life in the Pine Woods.
- 308 Hemlock Hank, Tough and True.
- 315 Flush Fred's Double; or, The Squatters' League.
- 327 Terrapin Dick, the Wildwood Detective.
- 337 Old Gabe, the Mountain Tramp.
- 348 Dan Dillon, King of Crosscut.
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